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Big, powerful people tried to remove me, says Modi

Cong in Karnataka changed Tech City to Tanker City: Modi

CHIKKABALLAPUR/ BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday said big and powerful people in India and abroad have joined hands to remove him from power.

Addressing a public meeting in Chikkaballapur, he said, "Mothers and sisters have come in a large number here. Your struggle and the challenges you face to nurture your family, Modi has seen this in his house. These days, big and powerful people in the country and abroad have united to remove Modi."

"But, because of Nari Shakti and Maatru Shakti's blessings and Suraksha kavach (safety armour), Modi is able to move on fighting challenges. Serving mothers, sisters and daughters and protecting them is Modi's priority," he said, listing out measures taken by his government for women's welfare in 10 years like supporting their self-help groups and creating 'Lakhpati Didis'.

The Prime Minister said the first phase of voting for Lok Sabha on Friday has gone in favour of NDA and 'Viksit Bharat'. Targeting the INDIA bloc, he said the Opposition alliance doesn't have a leader at present, and has no vision for the future, and "their history was of scams."

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections, in Bengaluru on Saturday **PHOTO: PTI**

Praising JD(S) patriarch and former prime minister HD Deve Gowda who shared the stage with him, for his energy and commitment at the age of 90, Modi said he too draws inspiration from him. "His (Gowda) commitment towards Karnataka, the pain in his heart for the plight of Karnataka today and the 'josh' in his voice, is the testimony for Karnataka's bright future," he said. The JD(S) joined the NDA in September last year.

Earlier, in his speech, Gowda hit out at Congress, Chief Minister Siddaramaiah and Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar over a sarcasm-laced newspaper advertisement campaign alleging that the Modi government's gift to Karnataka was empty 'Chombu' (a small, round water container).

Pointing at scams like 2G and coal gate during UPA rule under Manmohan Singh and Sonia Gandhi, he said, "After looting the resources of the state and the country during the Congress regime, Modi was given the empty 'Chombu', which the prime minister has turned into 'Akshaya Patre' in 10 years."

Congress changed Tech City to Tanker City: PM

Karnataka Congress government's only focus is corruption, Modi said at an election rally in the capital City. Bengaluru's founder Nadaprabhu Kempegowda had dreamt of a magnificent City, but the Congress government in less time, has ruined the situation here. Congress has changed tech City into tanker City, and has left it to the water mafia, he said. Plans are being drawn to develop Nandi hills at Chikkaballapur and Kolaramma Temple in Kolar as weekend getaways in recognition of the contribution made by the people of these two districts for the economic growth of the country, Modi said.

Referring to infrastructure development in the State in the last 10 years, Modi said the number of National Highways running through Karnataka has almost doubled. Now, there are 49 National Highways as against 25 some 10 years back, he said.

—PTI/ Salar News

The matter came to light after BJP approached the poll body seeking action against Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar **PHOTO: PTI**

FIR filed against DKS for poll violation: EC

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

- The matter came to light after BJP approached the poll body seeking action against Shivakumar after a video of him seeking votes from the residents of a housing society was shared widely on social media

An FIR has been registered against Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar for violation of Model Code of Conduct for allegedly promising water supply in exchange for votes to residents of a housing society near here, Election Commission said on Saturday.

The matter came to light after BJP approached the poll body seeking action against Shivakumar after a video of him seeking votes from the residents of a housing society in Bengaluru Rural Lok Sabha segment was shared widely on social media platforms.

Taking to social media platform 'X', the office of Chief Electoral Officer of Karnataka said the FIR was lodged by Flying Squad Teams of Bengaluru against Shivakumar for violation of MCC while addressing apartment owners in RR Nagar. The FIR was registered at RMC Yard police station under appropriate sections of Indian Penal Code for bribery and undue influence at elections, it stated. In the video clip, Shivakumar was purportedly heard saying he had come for a "business deal" and if the 2,510 houses in the housing society -- 6,424 votes -- went to his candidate, he assured them that their major issues concerning the supply of Cauvery river water and need for a civic amenity site would be resolved by him within three months.

Shivakumar's brother DK Suresh is seeking re-election from Bangalore Rural in the Lok Sabha elections. *—PTI*

Manipur: 3 arrested for shooting near polling booth

IMPHAL, 20 APRIL

Manipur Police arrested three persons who were involved in a firing incident near a polling station in Imphal East district, an officer said. The three arrested persons were involved in the firing incident at Moirangkampu Sajeb in Imphal East district in which a man was injured on Friday, the officer said. The three had fled from the spot in a four wheeler after the firing incident and were arrested on Friday evening less than 5 km away from the incident site. One .32 pistol with ammunition and Rs 1 5 lakh in cash were seized from their possession. A case has been filed and investigation is on, the officer added. *—PTI*

Odisha: Boat capsize toll reaches 8

JHARSUGUDA, 20 APRIL

A 35-year-old woman was killed, and seven others, including three children, are missing after a boat they were travelling in capsized in Odisha's Jharsuguda, police said on Saturday. According to officials, more than 50 people were on the boat when the incident took place in the Mahanadi River on Friday. The body of a 35-year-old woman has been recovered, and an operation to rescue the seven missing people, including three children, is ongoing. Officials added that more than 40 people have been rescued so far. Jharsuguda collector Kartikeya Goyal, who reached the sport after being alerted, told reporters, "ODRAF is continuing the search operation," the collector added. *—ANI*

4 women dead, 20 injured as truck hit tractor-trolley in UP

MAINPUR, 20 APRIL

Four women died and 20 people were injured when a tractor-trolley was hit by a truck here on Saturday. The accident happened around 4am near Fardpur village when around 35 people onboard the tractor-trolley were returning from a child's 'namkaran' ceremony. According to one of the injured passengers, Virendra Singh Lodhi Rajput, 25 women were among the 35 people who had gone to attend the ceremony of his daughter's child in Beldhara village. Inspector Bichwan Police Station Avanish Kumar Tyagi said when they reached Fardpur village, the headlight of the tractor developed some problems. They parked it on the roadside to fix it when a speeding truck rammed into the tractor-trolley. *—PTI*

IN BHAGALPUR

INDIA bloc to foil BJP's attempt to 'scrap' Constitution, says RaGa

BIHAR, 20 APRIL

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi on Saturday accused the ruling BJP at the Centre of trying to "scrap" the Constitution, but vowed that the opposition bloc INDIA would foil its attempt.

Addressing an election rally at Bhagalpur, his first in Bihar, Gandhi also scoffed at claims of BJP that it will win more than 370 seats in the Lok Sabha elections, asserting that "their tally will not go past 150". "The INDIA bloc is fighting to save democracy and the Constitution which the BJP-RSS combine is trying to scrap," Gandhi said.

The former Congress president also alleged, "Whatever the country's poor, Dalits and tribals have got, it is because of the Constitution. If the Constitution is scrapped, all things will come to an end."

Rahul Gandhi **PHOTO: X/@ INCINDIA**

Gandhi charged the Narendra Modi government with being pro-super rich, claiming that "under its rule, merely 22 people hold wealth that is equivalent to what 70 per cent of the population has. We want to change that".

He also spoke about promises made by the Congress in its manifesto, like scrapping the 'Agniveer' scheme and the right to apprenticeship.

Congress leader Rahul Gandhi took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi over electoral bonds on Saturday, alleging that he is running a "school of corruption" in the country and teaching all chapters in the subject of "entire corruption science".

On the social media platform 'X', Gandhi shared a video of a new Congress advertisement that takes a swipe at the BJP over the electoral bonds issue. "Narendra Modi is running a 'school of corruption' in the country, where under the subject 'entire corruption science', he is teaching every chapter in detail including 'donation business'," Gandhi said in a post in Hindi.

The former Congress chief claimed that the Prime Minister was teaching chapters on how the collection of donations is done through raids and how contracts are distributed after taking donations.

—PTI

Vote for future: Srinagar PDP candidate to Youth

SRINAGAR, 20 APRIL

> **Do not think the people of Kashmir are happy with your decisions post August 2019. They are not. There are many reasons behind it**
>
> -Waheed Parra
> PDP Srinagar candidate

The People's Democratic Party's (PDP) Srinagar candidate on Saturday appealed to Kashmir's youngsters to consider the general elections as a "referendum" to send to New Delhi a message about their "dissatisfaction" with the Centre's decisions post August 2019.

Waheed Parra, who is also the youth wing Chief of PDP, said there is a need to send a message "that you (New Delhi) should not accept the silence of Kashmir as its acceptance".

He told reporters during an election campaign at HMT in the city's outskirts, "I think the main aim and issue of this election, especially for us, is not about who is against us. The people in Srinagar, especially the youngsters of Kashmir, should not consider these elections as less than a referendum."

"Do not think they (people of Kashmir) are happy with you (on decisions post August 2019). They are not. There are many reasons behind it. The future of the people, especially youngsters, is uncertain," he said.

In August 2019, the Centre abrogated Article 370, which bestowed a special status on the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir. It also bifurcated Jammu and Kashmir into the Union Territories of Ladakh, and Jammu and Kashmir.

Parra said, "They are scared. They do not understand how they will get the feeling of security. That's why I appeal to the youngsters of Srinagar because when they set a trend, it spreads throughout Kashmir." *—PTI*

Rain breaks 150-day dry spell in B'luru

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

Residents of Bengaluru found solace from the relentless heatwave as light showers graced parts of South and East Bengaluru on Saturday. The much-awaited rainfall around 4pm brought a sigh of relief to the City, which had been grappling with severe water shortages.

Rainfall was reported in Banaswadi, Whitefield, Varthur, Sarjapur Road, Marathahalli, Bellandur, Bommanahalli, BTM Layout, Koramangala, Jayanagar, JP Nagar, HSR Layout, Banashankari, Uttarahalli, and Rajarajeshwari Nagar, among others.

Citizens took to social media platforms to express their joy and gratitude for the much-needed precipitation. One user on X platform said, "Finally, some relief from the scorching heat! Thank you, rain gods!" Another user shared, "Finally on a Saturday late afternoon, rain Gods are showering their blessings upon us." *—Salar News*

TISS suspends student for 'being anti-national'

MUMBAI, 20 APRIL

- He has also been accused of screening a banned BBC documentary on the TISS campus last January

Tata Institute of Social Sciences (TISS) has suspended a PhD student for two years for indulging in activities which are "not in the interest of the nation" and referred to instances like him participating in a protest in Delhi under the PSF-TISS banner.

Ramadas Prinisivanandan, 30, who is pursuing his doctorate in Development Studies, has also been debarred from entering the TISS campuses in Mumbai, Tuljapur, Hyderabad and Guwahati. In a notice sent to Prinisivanandan dated 7 March, TISS referred to instances like the screening of documentaries like 'Ram Ke Naam' ahead of 26 January as a "mark of dishonour and protest" against the Ram Mandir consecration in Ayodhya.

He has also been accused of screening a banned BBC documentary on the TISS campus last January and also organising the Bhagat Singh Memorial Lecture (BSML) by inviting "controversial guest speakers".

It said that these issues are "very serious and it is discernible that you are intentionally and deliberately indulging in such unlawful activities in the name of freedom of speech and expression." The Progressive Student Forum, a Left-leaning student body Prinisivanandan is associated with, said the march referred to by the TISS was related to "anti-student policies in the form of the National Education Policy". It also said BSML has had the distinction of inviting well-known academics, scholars and human rights activists, including two Ramon Magsaysay awardees. *—PTI*

AMIDST CONTROVERSIES

Thrissur Pooram concludes

THRISSUR, 20 APRIL

After a day of splendid festivities and excitement, controversies took the sheen off the iconic Thrissur Pooram due to alleged restrictions imposed by police and their reported interference in the proceedings.

For the first time in the history of the festival, the display of fireworks, one of the major attractions of the event, which was scheduled in the small hours, was held in daylight on Saturday, which turned out to be a disappointment to the festival buffs.

Thousands witnessed the high-octane Thrissur Pooram on Friday here in full grandeur on the sprawling grounds of the famed Vadakkunnathan Temple. The annual spectacle, which is generally billed as the mother of all temple festivals in the state, saw 30 caparisoned elephants standing face-to-face and being a part of the centuries-old customs and traditions. After the culmination of the Pooram festivities, differences cropped up between officials of Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu Devaswoms and the police over management of festival crowd. Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu Devaswoms are the main organisers of Thrissur Pooram.

Thiruvambady and Paramekkavu Devaswoms are the main organisers of Thrissur Pooram turn out to be a disappointment **PHOTO: SCREENGRAB**

Following arguments with police, Thiruvambady Devaswom called off the festival proceedings and held the customary rituals in a low-key manner.

The firework display, which was scheduled to begin at 3am, took place after 7am. While the firework display of Paramekkavu Devaswom was held after 7am, the "vedikkettu" of Thiruvambady Devaswom, which was initially reluctant for the display, was started later in the day.

People who came from across the state to witness the fireworks on Friday night strongly protested against its postponement. "We came from Wayanad and Kollam districts only to catch a glimpse of the firework display," a group of people said. *—PTI*

Don't miss voting in General polls, says CJI to voters

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud has urged citizens not to miss the opportunity to vote in the general elections, saying it is the "foremost duties" in a constitutional democracy.

In a video message for the Election Commission's 'My Vote My Voice' mission for the 2024 Lok Sabha polls, Justice Chandrachud said, "We are citizens of the world's largest democracy, which is our country."

"The Constitution gives us a multitude of rights as citizens but it also expects that each of us performs the duty, which is cast upon us. And one of the foremost duties of citizenship is to cast a vote in a constitutional democracy," he said.

"I will request every one of you please do not miss this opportunity to vote responsibly as citizens of our great motherland. Five minutes, every five years for our nation. It's doable, isn't it? Let's vote with pride. My vote, my voice," the CJI said. *—PTI*

Record number of candidates file nominations

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

Karnataka witnessed a surge in nominations for upcoming Lok Sabha elections as 337 candidates stepped forward to file their nominations. With 309 men and 28 women vying for victory, the State witnessed a remarkable display of democratic participation on the final day of submission, 19 April. This influx of nominations underscores the vibrant democratic spirit thriving within Karnataka's political landscape. As candidates from diverse backgrounds and ideologies throw their hats into the electoral ring, the electorate faces a multitude of choices come polling day, slated for 7 May. This surge in candidate participation marks a notable increase from the previous filing period, which saw 358 contenders vie for seats. Back in early April, 333 men and 25 women had entered, highlighting a consistent trend of robust political engagement within the State. The State Election Commission confirmed that each candidate's nomination was diligently processed, ensuring that no individual filed duplicate nominations. Thus, the final count of candidates accurately reflects the breadth of political representation poised to contest for the 14 Lok Sabha seats allocated to Karnataka.
—Salar News

PHOTO: PTI

Stay connected to people: BSY to party workers

HAVERI, 20 APRIL

Former Karnataka chief minister BS Yediyurappa on Friday called on voters in Gadag-Haveri Lok Sabha constituency to come out in numbers and demonstrate their support for senior party colleague and BJP's pick from the seat, Basavaraj Bommai. Speaking at a roadshow that he was front-lining in favour of Bommai, also a former chief minister, the stalwart Lingayat leader said, "I call on workers of BJP and JDS (NDA ally) to work together here and elsewhere in the State. They should visit every house and stay connected to the people till the last vote is cast." The people of Haveri wish to see Prime Minister Narendra Modi and ex-PM and JD(S) patriarch HD Deve Gowda campaigning jointly in the constituency, the former CM said. Earlier, Siddaramaiah claimed that neither BJP, which he claimed to have failed to fulfil its promises, nor the JD(S), which he accused of lacking morality by associating with the former, deserve to win people's support and electoral confidence. Also coming down heavily on former PM Gowda, the CM said while BJP failed its promises to the people, JD(S) lost its moral standing by aligning with the ruling party at the Centre.
—ANI

PHOTO: PTI

Tiger kills elephant calf in Bandipur

C'NAGAR, 20 APRIL

A tiger attacked and killed a four-month-old elephant calf on Ooty Road in Bandipur Tiger Reserve. The attack took place on Wednesday near Kekkanahalla check post and the calf succumbed to its injuries on Saturday. The mother elephant stood beside her calf's carcass, leading to the disruption in vehicular traffic. Forest Department officials arrived at the scene and cleared the carcass, resuming the vehicular traffic.
—Salar News

Modi govt is facing strong anti-incumbency, says CM

JD(S) a communal party after aligning with BJP: Siddaramaiah

MYSURU, 20 APRIL

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah on Saturday claimed that there is a strong anti-incumbency against Narendra Modi government.

Calling JD(S) a "communal party", for having an alliance with BJP in the State, he suggested it is better for its leadership to dissolve the outfit.

"This time, whether it is in Karnataka or in the country, there is no Modi wave. BJP candidates are seeking votes in the name of Modi, they are dependent on Modi. There is a strong anti-incumbency against the Modi government," Siddaramiah said.

Defending Congress' sarcasm-laced campaign alleging that the Modi government's gift to Karnataka was empty 'Chombu' (Kannada word for a round water pot), Siddaramaiah said, "Did they give Rs 15 lakh to every account holder as promised?, Did he create 2 crore jobs a year?, Did he double farmers income?, Did good days come?"

Chief Minister Siddaramaiah PHOTO: PTI

- Defending Congress' sarcasm-laced campaign alleging that the Modi government's gift to Karnataka was empty 'Chombu' (Kannada word for a round water pot), Siddaramaiah said, "Did they give Rs 15 lakh to every account holder as promised?, Did he create 2 crore jobs a year?, Did he double farmers income?"

Modi has not fulfilled even a single assurance he had given, he said. "So Modi has given the people of the State and the country an empty 'Chombu'. Let them (BJP) say anything, our (state's) coffers are not empty, we (Congress govt) have implemented five guarantee schemes, and we have continued the developmental works."

Alleging that JD(S) leader HD Kumaraswamy has become "communal" after joining hands with BJP, he claimed JD(S) is no longer a secular party.

Stating that the murder of Neha Hiremath in Hubballi is not a case of "love jihad", Siddaramaiah said, he strongly condemns the incident, and the accused has been arrested immediately.

"Investigation will be done seriously and it will be ensured that the culprit is strictly punished," the Chief Minister said.

In a shocking incident, Hiremath,23, daughter of Congress councillor of Hubballi-Dharwad Municipal Corporation Niranjan Hiremath, was stabbed to death on the campus of BVB College on Thursday.

The accused, Fayaz Khondunaik, who fled from the scene, was arrested by the police subsequently.

Noting that murders have taken place "during all times", Siddaramaiah said the government has taken the issue of law and order seriously. The law and order situation is good in Karnataka. "We will condemn all acts of murder, robbery or anything, and ensure that culprits are punished," he said, as he accused the opposition of using the death for political reasons.
—ANI

AICC General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala with others protest against Centre, in Bengaluru on Saturday. PHOTO: MOHAMMED ASAD

Congress stages empty pot protest against Centre

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

Congress workers on Saturday staged protests at various locations in the City holding empty pots against the inequity towards the State by the Centre.

The protest was held ahead of the visit of Prime Minister Narendra Modi to the State on Saturday. Police took the protesters, including AICC General Secretary Randeep Singh Surjewala and others into custody as they were staging a protest near the Mekhri Circle.

Surjewala said: "The Central government has done great injustice to Karnataka. In return for the demands of the Karnataka government and people for drought relief, the Centre had given 'chombu' (empty pot, which also stands for cheating in colloquial Kannada)."

"The people of the state had sought the release of Rs 6,000 crore for the Upper Bhadra Project which was declared in the budget, but the Central government had refused. If Karnataka gives Rs 100 as taxes, in turn, it is only getting Rs 13," Surjewala said.

He said the Central government which promised funds for the peripheral road of Bengaluru had given "chombu."

The people of Karnataka are also all set to give "chombu" to BJP in the Lok Sabha elections, he said. Revenue Minister Krishna Byre Gowda staged a protest with empty tumblers in Byatarayanapura.
—Salar News

If Cong leader's daughter is not safe, who will be safe?: BJP leader

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

BJP leader Shehzad Poonawalla on Saturday slammed the Congress party over the Hubballi murder and said the manner in which women are being killed in Karnataka in daylight, it seems "criminals are having a free run in the Congress government". Poonawalla said, "In Karnataka, what we are seeing is the complete destruction of law and order in the last few weeks, ever since the Congress has come." Poonawalla slammed the Karnataka government for not taking strong action against the accused in the case. "In this brutal gruesome incident, where the girl has been killed by the boy, instead of taking strong action against him and his mindset, we see Congress is busy shielding his mindset. If the Congress leader's daughter is not safe, who will be safe in Karnataka?" he said.

Accused nabbed within an hour: Police official

Hubballi-Dharwad Police Commissioner Renuka Sukumar said an FIR had been registered and the accused had been apprehended within an hour. The accused has been sent to judicial custody..
—ANI

Muslim groups demand stern punishment

HUBBALLI, 20 APRIL

The members of the Muslim community in Hubballi-Dharwad have condemned the murder of Neha Hiremath, an MCA student, on the premises of the KLE Technological University in Hubballi.

Anjuman-E-Islam, a local organisation representing the Muslim community, has also called for the stern punishment of the accused. A delegation by the organisation presented a memorandum to Hubballi-Dharwad Police Commissioner, Renuka Sukumar on Saturday.

The letter stated that the murder shocked the people of Hubballi and all students of Karnataka. "Through this letter, we request that an impartial investigation be carried out without any political or caste colour and arrest the accused who committed the murder, provide justice to the family of Niranjan Hirematha who lost his daughter and give the accused a severe punishment," the letter said.

Fayaz has been sent to judicial custody for 14 days. However, this has not quelled the public outcry. Protests also erupted in his hometown with individuals from various backgrounds, including Muslims, gathering at the town square and shouting slogans against the accused. The residents also observed a voluntary bandh. Concerned over the law and order situation, police deployed additional personnel to ensure public safety and provide security to the residence of the accused.

Anjuman-e-Islam presidents of Alnavara, Kundagola, Kalaghatag and Hubballi have also petitioned Chief Minister Siddaramaiah, demanding severe punishment for the accused.
—Salar News

HUBBALLI MURDER

BJP targets Cong for 'vote bank' politics

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

BJP on Saturday accused Congress government in Karnataka of misleading people over the murder of a girl on a college campus, alleging that it has prioritised the protection of its "vote bank" over the protection of women.

BJP General Secretary Vinod Tawde sought to draw a parallel between Karnataka's handling of Neha Hiremath's killing to the way West Bengal Chief Minister Mamata Banerjee allegedly shielded the Sandeshkhali case accused Shajahan Sheikh. "In a similar way, the Congress-led Siddaramaiah government in Karnataka is attempting to protect Fayaz who brutally murdered a Congress councillor's daughter Neha," he said.

He said Congress councillor Niranjan Hiremath has claimed that his daughter's murder is a case of "love jihad" but Chief Minister Siddaramaiah is framing it as a love affair and attempting to mislead the public. The Congress government should punish criminals severely, regardless of the religion, he said.

BJP's Vinod Tawde PHOTO: PTI

Neha (23), the daughter of Congress Councillor of Hubballi-Dharwad Municipal Corporation Niranjan Hiremath, was stabbed to death on the campus of BVB College on Thursday. The accused Fayaz Khondunaik, who fled the scene, was arrested by police subsequently. Neha was a first-year MCA student and Fayaz was her former classmate.
—PTI

Punish my son, says accused's mother

HUBBALLI, 20 APRIL

The mother of 23-year-old Fayaz, who killed the daughter of a Congress councillor inside a college campus in Hubballi, apologised to the victim Neha's family for her son's act and demanded strict punishment for him.

There have been protests in several parts of the State demanding capital punishment for Fayaz, who has been arrested in connection with the incident that occurred on 18 April.

With folded arms and tears in her eyes, the accused's mother Mamtaz, a teacher, said, "I apologise to the people of Karnataka as well as Neha's family for what my son has done. It is a great injustice to Neha and her family. What my son has done is completely wrong and we hang our heads in shame. What he did is a big mistake and he should be given strict punishment as per the law of the land," she said in Dharwad.

Mamtaz said that her son and Neha were not just friends but that they were in love. Mamtaz said she came to know about their relationship a year ago. "It was Neha who made the first move and took his phone number. My son did tell me about Neha and that he was in love with her and they wanted to get married. But I had suggested that he first focus on his career.

"My son was brilliant and always secured above 90 per cent marks since LKG and UKG days. He wanted to become an IAS officer," she said.
—PTI

Outrage, protest break out across State

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

The murder of MCA student Neha Hiremath has sent shock waves across Karnataka, igniting protests and demands for justice from various quarters. Members of the ABVP and Hindu activists took to the streets across the State, condemning the heinous act and demanding capital punishment for the accused, Fayaz Kondikoppa.

The protesters gathered outside the residence of Home Minister G Parameshwara in the City on Saturday, expressing their outrage and burning photos of the accused. However, their efforts were met with police intervention, leading to their detainment for staging a protest without permission.

Hindu activists joined the chorus of condemnation, staging protests in multiple districts, including Ramanagara, Kalaburagi, and Vijayapura. Burning effigies and tires, they demanded justice for Neha.

BJP MP BY Raghavendra said the accused had committed the crime under the influence of ganja. He criticised the Congress government for allegedly failing to provide adequate protection to Neha's family and accused them of prioritising the accused's family.

Deputy Chief Minister DK Shivakumar pledged swift action, vowing that "everyone involved will be booted into the prison." He reassured the public that justice would be served, regardless of any personal affiliations.

Amidst speculation of the murder being linked to 'love jihad', Chief Minister Siddaramaiah firmly denied such claims, labelling them as unfortunate attempts to politicise a tragic incident. He emphasised the government's commitment to ensuring stringent punishment for the perpetrator.

Members of ABVP and Hindu activists took to the streets across the State PHOTO: PTI

Former chief minister HD Kumaraswamy criticised the handling of the case by the current administration, accusing them of tarnishing the reputation of the victim's family. He questioned the government's ability to protect its citizens in the wake of such atrocities.

Minister for Women and Child Welfare Laxmi Hebbalkar visited the victim's family to offer condolences and reassurance of impartial investigation.

Investigation being misled: Neha's father

Niranjan Hiremath, father of Neha has claimed that the investigation of his daughter's murder is being "misled," and warned that his family would "commit suicide" if it continues.

About photos of his daughter Neha with the accused Fayaz being released on social media, the Congress corporator said "the photos are fake and 101 per cent done to botch up the investigation. We will write a letter in the name of the Chief Minister and Home Minister and commit suicide. We will also send the letter to the Governor. Instead of getting us justice for the murdered child, they are resorting to bringing disrepute to her and our family," Niranjan said.
—Salar News

SUPPORT FROM TELANGANA

Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy with Bengaluru Central Congress candidate Mansoor Ali Khan and MLA Rizwan Arshad at an election rally in Bengaluru on Saturday PHOTO: SALAR

BJP focussed on winning, not on State's development, says Revanth

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

Telangana Chief Minister Revanth Reddy has embarked on an assertive campaign trail in Karnataka, amplifying the Congress party's narrative and championing its legacy in the IT sector. His strategic foray into Bengaluru underscores the State's significance in the political arena.

Reddy wasted no time upon his arrival in Bengaluru, immediately immersing himself in the electoral fray. Addressing a crowd here, he highlighted the BJP's alliance with JD(S), juxtaposing it with their earlier stance on corruption allegations. "They just think about winning, they don't bother about developing Karnataka," Reddy said.

The Chief Minister's itinerary was meticulously crafted, blending vibrant roadshows with compelling public meetings. His engagements culminated in spirited corner meetings, showcasing his commitment to grassroots outreach.

> **Gandhi family is working for development. Siddaramaiah, DK, Kharge and Mansoor are working for the people and Modi family is ED, CBI, ADANI and Ambani, used to oppress people**
>
> -Revanth Reddy, Telangana Chief Minister

Throughout his addresses, Reddy underscored Bengaluru's status as the IT capital, attributing its development to Congress' progressive policies. He urged voters to endorse the Congress, citing its pivotal role in fostering the IT revolution. "We have Mansoor standing for Bengaluru Central, and I'm sure he will also keep his promises," Reddy said.

Not shying away from targeting the BJP, Reddy criticised their stance on dynasty politics, drawing comparisons with Maharashtra. He emphasised the BJP's selective accusations against the Gandhi family while highlighting their contributions and sacrifices. "Gandhi family is working for development. Siddaramaiah, DK, Kharge and Mansoor are working for the people and Modi family is ED, CBI, ADANI and Ambani, used to oppress people," Reddy said.

Reddy said, "Karnataka Congress kept its promises," urging voters to decide between those who deliver and those who merely seek power. As the electoral momentum builds, his rallying cry resonates with voters, setting the stage for a fiercely contested electoral landscape in Karnataka.

With the Lok Sabha elections looming, Reddy's vigorous campaigning reflects the Congress party's determination to reclaim political ground. His emphasis on developmental legacy and challenges to the BJP's narrative signal a keenly contested electoral battle.
—Salar News

PHOTO: PTI

21 cops & home guard injured as bus overturns

BETUL, 20 APRIL

Twenty-one police and Home Guard personnel were injured when the bus carrying them overturned in Madhya Pradesh's Betul district in the wee hours of Saturday, an official said. These jawans were returning to their home district Rajgarh in the state after performing their election duty when the accident occurred near Baretha Ghat on the Bhopal-Betul highway. The incident took place around 4am, Sub Divisional Officer of Police (SDOP) Shalini Paraste said. Eight of the personnel who received serious injuries are being treated in the district hospital at Betul, while those with minor injuries are being treated in Shahpur hospital, the police official said. The incident took place when the bus swerved to avoid a truck that crossed its path, she said. *—PTI*

Ex-Congress leader Tajinder Singh Bittu joins BJP

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

In yet another blow to Congress, Tajinder Singh Bittu joined BJP at the party headquarters in Delhi on Saturday in the presence of Union Minister Ashwini Vaishnaw and party general secretary Vinod Tawde. Tajinder Singh Bittu resigned from his post as AICC Secretary-in-Charge of Himachal Pradesh and primary membership Congress party earlier today. This comes at a crucial time, in the backdrop of Lok Sabha elections being held across the nation. Bittu's exit marks another setback for the Congress, which has witnessed an exodus of big leaders in the last few weeks. Speaking after joining BJP, Bittu said, "I have spent almost 35 years in the Congress Party, and today I feel that the Congress Party has deviated from the issues. *—ANI*

AIUDF supports Oppn parties to counter BJP

GUWAHATI, 20 APRIL

All India United Democratic Front (AIUDF) General Secretary Aminul Islam on Friday said that his party will contest in 3 constituencies and support other candidates in three more, to defeat BJP in the Lok Sabha polls. Aminul Islam, AIUDF General Secretary and MLA, added that his party is contesting two seats in the second and third phase polls. Our party has decided to extend our support to the BPF candidate in the Darrang-Udalguri seat, and TMC candidate Radheshyam Biswas in the Silchar seat in the second phase of the polls. Our party will also extend support to CPI (M) candidate Manoranjan Talukdar in the Barpeta seat," said Aminul Islam *—ANI*

491 candidates file nominations for 26 seats in Gujarat

AHMEDABAD, 20 APRIL

A total of 491 candidates have filed nomination forms for the 26 Lok Sabha constituencies in Gujarat where elections will be held in the third phase on 7 May, officials said on Saturday. As many as 227 candidates filed their papers on Friday, the last day of submission. Also, 39 candidates filed nominations for by-elections to five assembly seats, to be held on the same day, with 13 of them filing their papers on Friday. Of total 491 forms, 76 were submitted by BJP candidates, 60 by Congress, seven by AAP, 188 by independents and 160 by candidates of other, smaller parties. For the assembly byelections, BJP candidates filed ten forms, Congress 12, independents 16 and another party one. Union Home Minister Amit Shah, state BJP president C R Paatil, Congress leader Amit Chavda and Aam filed their papers on Friday. *—PTI*

WAR OF WORDS

Centre fascist and racist: Priyanka

She said BJP is working for Modi's 'friends'

THRISSUR, 20 APRIL

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra on Saturday attacked the BJP-ruled Centre, accusing it of being a "racist, fascist, and oppressive" government that was "haughtily" speaking of changing the Indian Constitution that was "written with the blood of freedom fighters."

Congress leader also charged BJP-led administration with working for the benefit of the Prime Minister's "monopolist friends," "protecting rapists and oppressors of women," extorting businesses through the electoral bonds, silencing dissenting voices by using government agencies, and "bullying" the judiciary.

Gandhi alleged that elected governments were being bought and sold at the will of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and people were being fed "false figures" about the economy when the common citizen was struggling to support his family amidst the rising prices of basic commodities.

She said it was time for the people to awaken as in the Bhagavad Gita, Lord Krishna "taught us to set aside fear, greed, and ego and embrace the ways of love, compassion, and humility." "How can we watch in silence while our beloved country is overrun by the untamed ego, greed, and ruthless arrogance of BJP, its allies, and its supreme leader?" Gandhi asked."Brothers and sisters, there is a great battle taking place across our nation today. So, my sisters and brothers, you have a onerous responsibility towards your country today. The choice you make in a few days will determine which side will win the battle for India," she said while speaking at a poll rally in the Chalakudy Lok Sabha seat seeking votes for Congress candidate Benny Behanan. "The government protects rapists and defends the oppressors and abusers of women, they vilify victims of heinous crimes, using the entire strength of their administrations to question the characters of victims of abuse. This is the new India," she alleged. *—PTI*

Congress leader Priyanka Gandhi Vadra with party candidate Shashi Tharoor in Thiruvananthapuram, Kerala on Saturday PHOTO: PTI

Cong a vine, sucks dry supporters: PM

He said voters have rejected INDIA bloc

NANDED/PARBHANI, 20 APRIL

Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Saturday dubbed Congress a vine which has no roots or branches and sucks dry those who support it, and asked people to be wary of the opposition alliance in realising the goals of 'Viksit Bharat' and 'Viksit Maharashtra'.

Modi, who addressed two election rallies in Maharashtra on Saturday - first in Nanded, followed by Parbhani - also said Congress has accepted its defeat even before the Lok Sabha poll results are out, and took a swipe at Rahul Gandhi, saying that just as he lost from Amethi in 2019, the "Congress' sahabzade" will lose the Wayanad parliamentary seat this time.

At the Parbhani rally, Modi said the 2024 polls were not just to form the government, but to make India developed and self-reliant.

"Congress is a vine which doesn't have roots or branches. It sucks dry those who lend support to it," Modi said, hitting out at Opposition.

He accused Congress of partitioning the country and claimed it did not allow the Constitution to be implemented in Kashmir under the pretext of Article 370.

Referring to Rahul Gandhi, he said, "The Congress' sahabzade sees a problem in Wayanad. He is waiting for the voting on April 26, after which he and his gang will look for a safe seat because after Amethi, he will have to leave Wayanad as well." "Will any voters waste their vote for such people? They will instead vote for 'Viksit Bharat'. Congress has been a barrier in the development of farmers, poor and women...Can't trust that the party will work for the country's progress," he said. Modi referred to Kerala Chief Minister Pinarayi Vijayan's recent remarks against Rahul Gandhi, and said, "Even I can't make such comments."Holding Congress-led governments' flawed policies for the agriculture crisis and farmers' problems, he said the NDA government was committed to work for their welfare. *—PTI*

Prime Minister Narendra Modi during a public meeting for Lok Sabha elections, in Bengaluru, on Saturday PHOTO: PTI

BJP's '400-plus movie' a flop: Tejashwi

PATNA, 20 APRIL

After the completion of the first phase of the Lok Sabha election, Rashtriya Janata Dal (RJD) leader Tejashwi Yadav on Saturday took a dig at the Bharatiya Janata Party and said that the BJP's "400 paar" film has become a super flop on the first day itself.

Yadav said that there is no competition in the first phase as Bihar will give shocking results this time.

"The Mahagathbandhan is winning all four seats in the first phase. We have held block wise meetings and the feedback that has come is very good the BJP's "400 paar" film has become a super flop on the first day itself. The people of Bihar are aware and will teach them a lesson," he said.

"There is no competition in the first phase. We have said many times before that Bihar will give shocking results this time. They have not done anything for the people of Bihar. The promises made by Modi ji in 2014 and 2019 were not fulfilled. Now the public is tired of their statements and false promises. We have promised that we will give special package to Bihar along with special status," Tejashwi added.

Further, former Bihar Chief Minister pointed out that the local issues hold dominance in this election.

"Today our rally is with Rahul Gandhi ji in Bhagalpur. The entire Mahagathbandhan and INDIA bloc are working together. Unemployment is the biggest issue in Bihar. Inflation, poverty, investment in the state is an issue. Migration and floods are also issues. This time the people of BJP are very worried. They say that they will abolish the Constitution. Those who destroy the Constitution will themselves be destroyed," Tejashwi said.

Meanwhile, according to the Election Commission, voter turnout in Bihar was recorded at 48.88 per cent in the first phase of the Lok Sabha election. *—ANI*

Tejashwi Yadav PHOTO: PTI

'Take action against officials for leaking list'

KOLKATA, 20 APRIL

Raj Bhavan here moved Election Commission of India (ECI) urging it to identify and take strong action against officials in the office of the Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) of West Bengal who may have "leaked names of gangsters and goons" to political parties, sources said on Saturday.

In the wake of the ongoing general elections, the office of Bengal Governor CV Ananda Bose had, using its own mechanism, compiled a list of suspected criminals across the state who could be used by political parties to intimidate voters on or before poll dates besides creating other law and order situations.

the list was shared with top officials of the CEO's office, West Bengal, through the state Director General of Police for appropriate pre-emptive action, an official said. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

BJP stands firm on reservations, Congress against OBC: Shah

JAIPUR/KOTA, 20 APRIL

Accusing Congress of being against the Other Backward Classes, Union Home Minister Amit Shah Saturday said even if the Opposition party wants to do away with the reservation given to SC, ST and OBCs, BJP will not allow that to happen.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi belongs to OBC community, he said, adding that it was Modi who implemented schemes for people of small backward classes.

Shah was addressing an election rally in support of Lok Sabha Speaker Om Birla, the BJP's candidate and sitting MP from the Kota Lok Sabha seat.

"Even if the Congress party wants to remove SC, ST and OBC reservation... we will not allow it. This is Modi's guarantee," he asserted.

He said that before the Modi government, there was no scheme in the country for communities such as those of blacksmiths, tailors, carpenters and boat-makers but Modi spent Rs 13,000 crores and connected them with skill development and self-employment schemes.

Urging people to vote for the BJP candidate, Shah said, "Press the button of the lotus symbol on the EVM so hard so that electric shocks are felt in Italy."Urging people to vote for BJP candidate, Shah said, "Press the button of the lotus symbol on the EVM so hard so that electric shocks are felt in Italy." *—PTI*

Amit Shah PHOTO: PTI

MANIPUR: CONG DEMANDS REPOLL IN 47 BOOTHS

IMPHAL, 20 APRIL

Congress has demanded repoll in 47 polling stations in Manipur alleging that booths were captured and elections to two Lok Sabha constituencies in the northeastern state were rigged.

Incidents of firing, intimidation, destruction of EVMs at some polling booths and allegations of booth capturing were reported from conflict-hit Manipur that recorded a turnout of over 68 per cent in the two Lok Sabha constituencies - Inner Manipur and Outer Manipur - on Friday.

Congress President K Meghachandra said the party has lodged a complaint with Manipur Chief Electoral Officer demanding repoll in 36 polling stations in Inner Manipur constituency and 11 in Outer Manipur constituency. Meghachandra said "Unidentified armed miscreants have been threatening Congress candidate Angomcha Bimol Akoijam and party election agents for some days." *—PTI*

Voters show their identification cards a polling station in Bastar district on Friday PHOTO: PTI

In dreaded Maoist leader's village, people boycott polls

SUKMA, 20 APRIL

While the residents of several remote villages in Chhattisgarh's Bastar Lok Sabha constituency defied the poll boycott call given by Maoists and exercised their franchise on Friday, people from Puvarti village, the native place of a hardcore Naxalite leader, chose to stay away from the electoral process and boycotted the polls.

Puvarti, a Maoist-stronghold in Sukma district bordering Bijapur district, is the home village of dreaded Naxalite leader Hidma, who is believed to be the mastermind of several deadly attacks on security forces in Bastar region.

Polling was held in the Bastar Lok Sabha seat on Friday and a voter turnout of 67.56 per cent was recorded there. Some officials said the villagers did not cast their vote out of fear. The number of voters in Puvarti is 332, Tekalgudiyam 158 and Jonaguda 157 - which comes to a total of 547 voters for Puvarti booth, he said. *—PTI*

Sharmila files paper from Kadapa seat

KADAPA, 20 APRIL

YS Sharmila, Andhra Pradesh Congress chief and party's candidate, filed her nomination from the Kadapa seat on Saturday.

Earlier this year, Sharmila joined Congress and merged her party, YSR Telangana Party, into Congress.

Kadapa Constituency will vote in the fourth phase of the Lok Sabha election on 13 May

Kadapa seat comprises seven Assembly segments: Badvel, Kadapa, Pulivendla, Kamalapuram, Jammalamadugu, Proddatur and Mydukur.

Kadapa seat at present is represented by YS Sharmila's cousin, Avinash Reddy.

In the 2019 election, YS Avinash Reddy of Yuvajana Sramika Rythu Congress Party got 7,83,499 votes.

Chadipirala Adi Narayana Reddy from TDP got 4,02,773 votes, while Gundlakunta Sreeramulu from Congress received 8,341 votes. *—ANI*

Will PM deliver on his promise to put Chavan in jail, asks Cong

New Delhi, 20 April

Congress on Saturday took a swipe at Prime Minister Narendra Modi, asking whether he would deliver on his promise to put BJP's Rajya Sabha MP Ashok Chavan in jail.Congress General Secretary Jairam Ramesh said the Prime Minister should revisit his words from his campaign in Nanded on 30 March, 2014, when he launched a ferocious attack on Chavan -- "now the latest labaarthi of the 'BJP Washing Machine Yojana'".He said Modi had announced that he would send Chavan to jail "within six months" if he became the Prime Minister."A decade later, Chavan is not in jail, continues to be under investigation, and is a Rajya Sabha MP from the BJP. Does PM Modi hold the BJP to be 'shameless' as well? Will he conspire to get Chavan a clean chit soon? Will he deliver on his promise to put the BJP's Rajya Sabha MP Ashok Chavan in jail," Ramesh asked. *—PTI*

FROM MAOIST HOTBED

5K electors to vote for 1st time in Jh'kand

RANCHI, 20 APRIL

Around 5,000 electors from 'Budha Pahad'--a former Maoist hotbed --will cast their votes at their own booths for the first time after several decades in Lok Sabha polls, an election official said on Saturday.

Located along Jharkhand's Latehar and Garhwa districts, Budha Pahad was freed recently from the red rebels' control by security forces after over three decades.

There are five polling stations in Budha Pahad comprising around 5,000 voters. Earlier, these booths were used to be relocated to safe areas in view of Maoist activities, the official said.

Jharkhand Chief Electoral Officer (CEO) K Ravi Kumar along with senior police officers on Friday visited the difficult terrain of Budha Pahad, which falls under Palamu Lok Sabha constituency, and took stock of the facilities extended to the voters.

The Palamu constituency will go to the polls on 13 May.

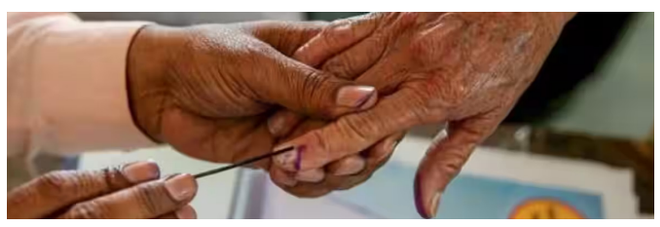
Kumar visited the polling booths and also talked to voters and polling officials.

"The voters here will exercise their franchise for the first time at their places after many decades. The credit goes to security forces for making this place terror-free," Kumar told reporters at Budha Pahad.

He said that elections could not be held here for many years due to security reasons. "Now the place has become safe and secured," he said.

State Police Nodal Officer, Amol V Homkar said that the first police camp had been set up at the top of the hill of Budha Pahad on 27 January, 2023. Homkar said that people are very enthusiastic here to participate in the polling process for the first time.

A total of 14 Maoists were killed, while 590 others were either apprehended or had surrendered *—PTI*



Budha Pahad was freed recently from the red rebels' control by security forces after over three decades PHOTO: PTI

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Boys outshine girls in class 10 board exams in Assam

GUWAHATI, 20 APRIL

Boys outshone girls in the class 10 board examinations in Assam, results of which were declared on Saturday. The overall pass percentage in the High School Leaving Certificate (HSCL) examination held in February-March this year was 75.7 per cent, the Board of Secondary Education, Assam, (SEBA) said. The total percentage was an improvement over the last two years, with the pass percentages in 2022 and 2023 being 56.4 per cent and 72.6 per cent respectively. A total of 4,19,078 students, comprising 1,87,904 boys, 2,31,164 girls and 10 transgenders, had appeared in the examination.The pass percentage among boys was 77.3 per cent, girls 74.4 per cent and transgenders 80 per cent. *—PTI*

80-year-old man killed in elephant attack in Ch'garh

RAIGARH, 20 APRIL

An 80-year-old man was trampled to death by a wild elephant in a village in Chhattisgarh's Raigarh district in the early hours of Saturday, a forest official said. The incident occurred around 5.30am in the forest near Dhantikra village under the Chhal forest range where the victim, Janakram Sahu, had gone to gather 'mahua' fruits, Dharamjaigarh division forest officer Abhishek Jogawat said. The victim, a resident of Kharra village, was accompanied by another villager, Jaipal Sahu,42, he said. While Jaipal managed to escape, the elephant caught hold of the octogenarian and trampled him to death, he said. Jaipal alerted villagers and authorities about the attack, following which personnel from the forest department and police reached the spot, the official said. *—PTI*

New criminal laws have modernised legal framework: CJI

He said improvements have been done to protect victim interests

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

The Chief Justice of India, Justice DY Chandrachud, on Saturday said that "the newly enacted criminal laws have transitioned India's legal framework on criminal justice into the new age."

Addressing a conference on India's Criminal Justice System organised by the Ministry of Law and Justice, the CJI said that much needed improvements have been introduced to protect victim interests and carry out the investigation and prosecution of offences efficiently.

"India is set for a significant overhaul of its criminal justice system with the upcoming implementation of three new criminal laws. The Bharatiya Nyaya Sanhita, Bharatiya Nagarik Suraksha Sanhita, and Bharatiya Sakshya Adhiniyam will replace the Indian Penal Code 1860, the Code of Criminal Procedure 1973 and the Indian Evidence Act 1872, respectively.

These laws signify a watershed moment for our society because no law affects the day-to-day conduct of our society like the criminal law," he said.

Criminal law directs the moral arc of a nation.

While addressing the Conference on India's Progressive Path in the Administration of the Criminal Justice System, Chandrachud said, "Our laws and their implementation are an ever-evolving area.

There is no finality to any law or the manner of its implementation. However, we must be willing to embrace positive changes to meet the needs of our times."

"I expect that with the implementation of the new criminal laws, we will discover loopholes and areas that need to be addressed. Such debates would be helpful in enhancing the efficiency of our criminal justice systems.

However, the ideological framework at the heart of our analysis must be justice-oriented with a civil liberty-centric approach that balances the interests of the victim and the accused," he added.

The 248th Report of the Standing Committee of the Rajya Sabha on the Bharatiya Sakshya Samhita of 10 November, 2023, noted that the Indian criminal justice system has struggled to keep pace with the profound technological changes our socio-economic milieu that have radically re-imagined the way in which crimes manifest in society.

The growing scope of technology and new-age crime, which use the digital landscape to create networks of collaborative units to commit crimes, cannot be pinned to investigative situations.

This has presented challenges in the investigation of crimes, admission of evidence, prosecution, and delivery of justice, the CJI said. *—ANI*

Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachudh said these laws signify a watershed moment for our society **PHOTO: PTI**

ED, CBI were established during your rule: Meghwal to Oppn

New Delhi, 20 April

Law Minister Arjun Ram Meghwal on Saturday took a swipe at opposition parties over their allegations of misuse of ED and CBI by the government, saying the agencies were established during their rule.

He asserted that action will take place according to law.Chief Justice of India DY Chandrachud, several judges, law officers and government officials were present. *—PTI*

IN DELHI

Kejriwal is being pushed towards 'slow death': AAP

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Aam Aadmi Party on Saturday alleged that Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal is being pushed towards a "slow death" inside Tihar jail by denying him insulin and consultations with his doctor.

Kejriwal, who has Type-2 diabetes, has been asking for insulin and a video conferencing with his family doctor but his requests are being denied by the jail administration, party spokesperson Saurabh Bharadwaj said.

Bharadwaj slammed the Tihar administration, BJP, Centre and Delhi LG for allegedly denying insulin to Kejriwal and said the Delhi Chief Minister had been suffering from diabetes for the last 20-22 years.

On Friday, the Chief Minister's counsel senior advocate Abhishek Singhvi said Kejriwal has not been administered insulin to control his sugar levels since his arrest, terming it "shocking" and "alarming".

ED had on Thursday claimed before the court that Kejriwal was eating food high in sugar like mangoes and sweets every day, despite having Type-2 diabetes, to create grounds for medical bail.Kejriwal, however, refuted the ED's claims. *—PTI*

COURT RESERVES ORDER ON SISODIA'S BAIL

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

A court here on Saturday reserved its order on the bail pleas of AAP leader Manish Sisodia in corruption and money laundering cases, lodged by the CBI and the ED in the alleged Delhi excise policy case.

Special judge for CBI and ED, Kaveri Baweja, reserved the order for 30 April after hearing arguments from the central probe agencies as well as the counsel appearing for Sisodia.The Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leader had also moved interim bail pleas in both cases to campaign for the upcoming Lok Sabha polls. However, Sisodia's counsel told the court on Saturday that the plea has become infructuous as the regular bail plea is being reserved.CBI as well as ED have alleged that irregularities were committed while modifying the Delhi Excise Policy, undue favours were extended to licence holders, licence fee was waived or reduced and licences were extended without the competent authority's approval. *—PTI*

TESLA MAY BE DELAYED

Musk says India visit delayed due to obligations

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

American tech billionaire Elon Musk on Saturday said his proposed visit to India has been postponed due to "very heavy Tesla obligations".

The electric carmaker Tesla CEO -- who was expected to be in India on 21 April and 22 and scheduled to meet Prime Minister Narendra Modi -- wrote on X that he is looking forward to coming to India later this year. A post said the visit has been postponed as he needs to attend Tesla's earnings call on 23 April.

Earlier this month, he had confirmed his visit to India with a post on X saying, "Looking forward to meeting with Prime Minister @ NarendraModi in India".

In June last year, Musk met with Modi during the latter's US visit and stated that he planned to visit India in 2024 while expressing confidence that Tesla would enter the Indian market soon. His proposed visit had raised expectations that he would announce plans for electric car maker Tesla to set up shop in the country, along with his satcom venture Starlink.

It was also expected that Musk would announce plans for Tesla to set up its manufacturing unit in India and investments for the same that could be to the tune of billions of dollars and the way forward for selling Tesla electric cars in India at the earliest.

His planned visit to India came weeks after the government announced a new electric vehicle policy, under which import duty concessions will be given to companies setting up manufacturing units in the country with a minimum investment of USD 500 million, a move aimed at attracting major global players like Tesla.

. On Thursday, an advisor representing Tesla -- The Asia Group (TAG) -- had attended a stakeholders' meeting on the new EV policy, along with those from Vietnam's EV maker VinFast and all the major manufacturers in India, including Maruti Suzuki, Hyundai, Tata, Mahindra, Kia, Skoda Auto Volkswagen India, Renault, Mercedes-Benz, BMW and Audi *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

Liquor scam kingpin gave Rs 60cr to BJP, alleges AAP

New Delhi, 20 April

AAP Rajya Sabha MP Sanjay Singh on Saturday assailed BJP, alleging that it took Rs 60 crore from an accused in the "so-called" liquor scam case but Enforcement Directorate took no action in the matter.Singh said Aam Aadmi Party (AAP) leaders, including Delhi Chief Minister Arvind Kejriwal, Manish Sisodia and himself, were arrested in the liquor scam case without any evidence.

"Sarath Reddy, whom the ED in its charge sheet termed the kingpin of the liquor scam, gave Rs 60 crore through electoral bonds. But the agency took no action in this matter," Singh alleged *—PTI*

UP: 85 official document missing, 2 booked

BALLIA, 20 APRIL

A case has been registered against two revenue department personnel here after 85 official documents went missing from a locker, police said on Saturday Bairiya Station House Officer (SHO) Dharam Veer Singh said, on the complaint of local Tehsildar Sudarshan Kumar, the FIR was registered against Om Prakash Patel and Manoj Kumar here on Friday. In his complaint, the tehsildar alleged that 85 documents, which were stored in a locker, are missing. The locker's keys were with the two personnel. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PIXABAY

Man duped of Rs 45.6l in trading fraud, 6 booked

THANE, 20 APRIL

A 44-year-old man from Navi Mumbai was allegedly duped of Rs 45.6 lakh by cyber fraudsters who lured him to invest in share trading, police said on Saturday The cyber police on Thursday registered a case against six persons under sections 419 (cheating), 406 (criminal breach of trust) and other relevant provisions of the Indian Penal Code and the Information Technology (IT) Act, an official said.The complainant, a resident of Panvel, came across a link called "Stock Loss Recovery" on Instagram and was routed to various groups involved in stock market trading, he said.The official said the complainant started share trading and invested Rs 47 lakh in March and April. *—PTI*

CBI visits Sandeshkhali to probe crime agsinst women

KOLKATA, 20 APRIL

A 10-member team of the CBI on Saturday visited Sandeshkhali in West Bengal's North 24 Parganas district to probe alleged crimes against women and land-grabbing, an official said.

One part of the team of the Central Bureau of Investigation (CBI) visited houses of the victims in Sundarikhali area of Sandeshkhali and spoke to them individually, documenting their allegations, he said.

Another part of the team visited Sandeshkhali Police Station and spoke with local policemen regarding the investigation.

"We are in Sandeshkhali to speak to villagers in connection with crimes against women and land-grabbing. We are noting down their allegations," the official told PTI.

The Calcutta High Court last week ordered a CBI investigation into allegations of crimes against women and land-grabbing in Sandeshkhali, which had witnessed protests over the issues.The court directed the CBI to investigate the allegations and submit a comprehensive report to it.Enforcement Directorate (ED) officials were attacked on 5 January by a mob when they went to Sandeshkhali to search the premises of now-suspended Trinamool Congress leader Shajahan Sheikh in connection with alleged ration distribution scam case. *—PTI*

Bishnoi's man to carry out 'major incident', cops recieve threat call

MUMBAI, 20 APRIL

Mumbai Police on Saturday said that it received a threat call from an unknown person who informed that gangster Lawrence Bishnoi's man was going to come to Mumbai and carry out a major incident.

"After the call, the Mumbai Police control contacted the local police station," police said.

Earlier, a 20-year-old youth was arrested for booking a cab from Bollywood superstar Salman Khan's residence in the name of gangster Lawrence Bishnoi on Friday.

According to Mumbai police, the accused has been identified as Rohit Tyagi, a 20-year-old man from Ghaziabad, Uttar Pradesh.

Sharing details, police said that the accused had booked a cab in the name of Lawrence Bishnoi from Galaxy Apartment, the house of actor Salman Khan, to the Bandra Police Station.

"When the cab driver reached Galaxy Apartment at Salman Khan's house and asked the watchman there about the booking, the watchman who was stunned at first, immediately informed about the booking to the nearby Bandra Police Station," police said.

PHOTO: PTI

- Earlier, a 20-year-old youth was arrested for booking a cab from Bollywood superstar Salman Khan's residence in the name of gangster Lawrence Bishnoi on Friday. According to Mumbai police, the accused has been identified as Rohit Tyagi from Ghaziabad

Earlier, on Tuesday, Kutch Police arrested the two accused persons and handed them to the Mumbai Crime Branch. Later, a city court sent the two accused to the custody of the Mumbai Crime Branch until 25 April in connection with the firing incident. *—ANI*

SOUMYA VISHWANATHAN'S MOTHER MOVES SC

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

The mother of TV journalist Soumya Viswanathan has moved the Supreme Court against the bail granted to four convicts who were serving life imprisonment in the 2008 case of her daughter's murder.

The Delhi High Court on 12 February suspended the sentence of Ravi Kapoor, Amit Shukla, Baljeet Singh Malik and Ajay Kumar and granted them bail till the pendency of their appeals challenging their conviction and sentence.

Kapoor, Shukla and Malik were also convicted in the 2009 Jigisha Ghosh murder case and are still in jail.

Vishwanathan, who worked with a leading English news channel, was shot dead on 30 September, 2008. *—PTI*

Punjab: 54 trains cancelled as farmers sit on tracks

AMBALA, 20 APRIL

A total of 54 trains on the Ambala-Amritsar route were cancelled on Saturday as farmers squatted on tracks at the Shambhu railway station in Punjab's Patiala district for the fourth day, officials said.

The protestors have been demanding the release of three farmers arrested by the Haryana Police during the ongoing stir.

The protest has affected the movement of 380 trains in the last three days, causing inconvenience to passengers, they added.

The farmers have been protesting under the banner of the Samyukta Kisan Morcha (Non-Political) and Kisan Mazdoor Morcha (KMM) in Patiala district's Shambhu.

They began their protest for the release of arrested farmers on Wednesday by squatting on the tracks on the Ambala-Ludhiana-Amritsar route in Shambhu near the Punjab-Haryana border.

. Farmer leader Sarwan Singh Pandher said the protest will continue until the three farmers are released.

The SKM (Non-Political) and the KMM are spearheading the 'Delhi Chalo' march by farmers to press the government to accept their demands, including legal guarantee of Minimum Support Price (MSP) for crops. *—PTI*

PHOTO: PTI

TRAIN TO SIKKIM

Emergency exit completed, caving averted

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Sivok-Rangpo Rail Project, which will connect Sikkim to the railway network for the first time, has got a major boost with the completion of an 855-metre-long emergency exit tunnel.

A 20-metre section of the tunnel runs under National Highway-10, along the Teesta river, and according to officials, mining through its soft and loose soil was the most challenging part of the whole project as there was a high risk that it might cave in, snapping Sikkim's road connectivity with the rest of the country.

"NH-10 is the only road network that connects Sikkim with other parts of the country. It was a huge challenge for us to mine a tunnel 18 metres below the highway, because the soil is soft and loose, just like the river sand bed (fine to coarse-grained), with alternate bands of pebble, cobble and boulders," an official from Ircon International, which is constructing the project, said.

"Mining for only that 20-metre distance, which is the width of NH-10 including the impact areas on both sides along the highway, has been the most challenging moment of the project so far. We completed it successfully, without causing a single millimetre of deformation to the highway," he added.

Railway officials said they used the secant-piling method, rarely used in tunnel mining. After getting it proof-checked by the Indian Institute of Technology (IIT), Ircon officials prepared a case study, explaining the ingenuity of the mining work.

Sivok-Rangpo Rail Project (SRRP), covering a total length of 44.96 km between Sivok in West Bengal and Ranpo in Sikkim), has 14 tunnels, 22 bridges (13 major, nine minor) and five railway stations -- Sivok, Riyang, Teesta Bazar, Melli and Rangpo.A railway official said of the 14 tunnels, mining work has been completed in 10 and of these 10, the lining work has been finished in four. The longest tunnel of the project is 5.3km and the shortest 538 metres. *—PTI*

A 20-metre section of the tunnel runs under National Highway-10, along the Teesta river **PHOTO: PIXABAY**

VOTING AWARENESS

Students participate in a voting awareness programme for phase 2 elections , in Jammu, Saturday
PHOTO: PTI

The yoga guru under fire over Patanjali's 'natural cures'

In a video on his YouTube Channel Swami Ramdev - that has over 10 million subscribers - the yoga guru lies on his back on the stage, knees curled up to his chest in 'pawanmuktasan', a yoga pose that's supposed to ease flatulence.

Next to him is a stack of medicines produced by Patanjali Ayurved, which claims to sell "herbomineral preparations".

Formed by Baba Ramdev and his close aide Acharya Balkrishna in 2006, Patanjali sells everything from toothpaste to skin care and wellness products. But the Ayurvedic medicines are among its most sought-after products.

He lists out a range of health issues - from fever and typhoid to liver damage and skin problems - and chides his audience for using "poisonous, synthetic" medicines to treat such illnesses. He urges them to use Patanjali products instead.

In another video, he explains what cancer is and claims that chemotherapy, radiation and surgery do not address the cause of the disease.

He then makes the extraordinary claim that Patanjali's "anti-cancer juice", combined with a strict diet regimen, helps "cure all types of cancer in seven days to two months".

His audiences break into applause.

But last week, India's Supreme Court banned the ads, saying the yoga guru was spreading misinformation and misleading consumers.

According to the Drugs and Magic Remedies (Objectionable advertisements) Act 1954, it is illegal to promote drugs meant for the treatment and cure of 54 medical conditions, including cancer, heart disease and blood pressure.

The judges refused to accept Baba Ramdev and Mr Balkrishna's "unconditional apology", saying they had "wilfully disobeyed" their order. "Your apology is not worth the paper it's written on," the court said, adding that "you [should] suffer consequences".

The judges also rebuked the State Licensing Authority - the watchdog for Ayurvedic drugs and other traditional medicinal practices - and the Uttarakhand government (the Himalayan state where Patanjali's headquarters is located) for not taking action against Patanjali for violating laws.

Supreme court banned Patanjali ads saying Ramadev was spreading misinformation and misleading consumers ***PHOTO: X/ @TEESARIBAAR2528***

The court ordered Patanjali and its founders to issue a public apology before the next hearing to 23 April.

Experts, however, say the court's reprimand is too little, too late.

They point out that Patanjali and Baba Ramdev have a long history of dismissing allopathic drugs and legitimate medical practices as ineffective, while championing the curative powers of their products.

In 2021, during the Covid-19 pandemic, Patanjali had launched Coronil - a herbal tablet - which it claimed could "treat and cure" the coronavirus.

Marketing had to be stopped after an intervention by the Indian government, which said there was no data to show it worked as a treatment. However, the company continued to insist that it worked against the virus.

It's not just their drugs - Patanjali's edible goods have also been criticised for being sub-standard.

In 2022, Patanjali's "pure cow ghee" (clarified butter) failed a food safety test, but Baba Ramdev dismissed the findings by saying that the samples had been tampered with. In 2023, the brand was sent a legal notice for allegedly using cuttlefish in a dental product marked as vegetarian.

In fact, Patanjali has faced so many controversies over a decade - as a simple Google search will show you - that it's hard to keep track of all of them.

The latest proceedings against the firm started in 2022 after the Indian Medical Association (IMA) went to court against a "false" advertisement claiming that the firm's products could cure thyroid, diabetes and even macular degeneration.

Last year, the court ordered them to stop making such claims and threatened to impose a fine of 10m rupees ($119,600; £96,000) for every product.

Its lawyers agreed to follow the order, but a day later Baba Ramdev doubled down on the "curative" powers of Ayurvedic medicines and said he was ready to "face the death penalty" if his claims were found to be false.

He accused some doctors of being biased against traditional medicine and alleged they were spreading false propaganda about his brand.

Patanjali continued airing its controversial ads - in newspapers, on radio, television and at Baba Ramdev's yoga workshops in various states.

The case came back into focus in January when the Supreme Court received an anonymous letter flagging the company's refusal to follow the court's order.

Experts say Patanjali products are dubious because the firm has poor manufacturing practices.

But the brand has vigorously defended its products, claiming that they're clinically proven and follow "more than 3,000 research protocols".

In 2016, a court in Haridwar asked Patanjali to pay a fine of 1m rupees for selling certain products under its label although it was made by another company.

The court also directed district authorities to take action against the brand if it failed to improve the quality of its products after some essential commodities like salt, jam, oil and honey, had failed quality tests.

At the time, Balkrishna told Times of India newspaper that Patanjali's products were "completely safe", their quality was "unquestionable" and that the brand would react "suitably" to the order.

But despite the serious allegations, the firm has escaped regulatory action.

Experts say that's because Baba Ramdev remains a massively popular figure. His followers see him as an expert on all things natural and traditional, insulating Patanjali against any kind of criticism.

—BBC News

LETTERS write to us at salar@salar.news

SALAR ساڈا

At 31%, overall water storage in reservoirs at its lowest

The overall water storage in the major reservoirs and river basins in the country has dropped less than the average storage recorded in a decade for the corresponding period, according to data released by the Central Water Commission (CWC).

CWC's weekly update released on 18 April, 2024 showed that except for central and eastern India, all the other regions – northern, western and southern – show water levels less than the average of the last 10 years for the corresponding period.

CWC, which monitors 150 major reservoirs across the country, has recorded a live storage of 56.085 billion cubic metres (BCM), which is 31 per cent of the total live storage capacity of these reservoirs. Last week, the total live storage was 33 per cent.

The live storage was nearly half at 17 per cent of its total live storage capacity in 42 reservoirs, which was about 30 per cent last year during this period.

In the western states such as Maharasthra and Gujarat, live storage is about 33.9 per cent of the capacity in the 49 reservoirs, CWC recorded. In the northern states of Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Rajasthan, live storage was 32.5 per cent in 10 reservoirs.

In the 23 reservoirs scattered across the eastern states of Assam, Odisha, West Bengal, Jharkhand, Tripura, Bihar and Nagaland, live storage was 40.6 per cent. Last year, the storage was 35 per cent in this period.

In as many as 26 reservoirs in the central region across Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Uttarakhand, the live storage stands at 40 per cent compared to 44 per cent for the corresponding time last year. However, it is higher than the average storage for the last 10 years which is recorded at 37 per cent.

The situation is extremely critical in the river basins of the southern and eastern regions, where the east-flowing rivers between Pennar and Kanyakumari, Cauvery and west-flowing rivers from Tadri to Kanyakumari are deficient in their water storage.

The east-flowing rivers between Mahanadi and Pennar are highly deficient in water storage. These rivers have gone 100 per cent deficient compared to the average storage in 10 years, which is 19 per cent. They have no water storage this year.

In the Pennar river basin, the water levels are at 1.35 per cent of its total capacity, a deficit of over 96 per cent of the decade's average storage.

CWC calls a reservoir 'deficient' if the storage shortfall is more than 20 per cent of the normal and 'highly deficient' if the shortfall exceeds 60 per cent. 'Normal' storage is defined as the average storage of water in the past 10 years.

About 13 major rivers such as Rushikulya, Bahuda, Vamsadhara, Nagavali, Sarada, Varaha, Tandava, Eluru, Gundlakamma, Tammileru, Musi, Paleru and Munneru are now showing a declining water storage trend. These rivers cover a landscape of 86,643 square kilometres, providing irrigation water to at least 60 per cent of the total area.

River basins and reservoirs provide water for irrigation, annual drinking water needs and operating hydro-electricity power projects.

The reason for the massive decline in water storage is the rainfall deficit in these reservoir catchment areas.

Since March, several India Meteorological Department sub-divisions recorded rainfall deficits. Andaman and Nicobar Islands, for instance, recorded 96 per cent deficit; Konkan and Goa stations showed 92 per cent deficit in rainfall. A deficit was also recorded in Aruncachal Pradesh, Assam and Meghalaya, Nagaland, Manipur, Haryana, Chandigarh, Delhi, Punjab and West Rajasthan.

About 53 reservoirs, incuding Umrong, Kandong, Gumti, Jawai dam, Surya, Barvi, Mula, Bhandardara, Khadakwasla, Dhom, Bhatsa, Manikdoh, Upper Tapi, Urmodi, Bhatghar, Nira Deighar, Thokarwadi, Kanher, Tillari, Mulshi, Dhumbhe Veer, Chaskaman, Panshet, Bhama Askhed, Darna, Yeleru, Donkarayi, Sriram Sagar, Lower Manair and others have close to zero water storage.

The situation is likely to aggravate with states such as Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh and Telangana already facing water shortage. *—Downtoearth*

The overall water storage in major reservoirs has dropped less than average ***PHOTO: UNSPLASH***

Patna to B'luru: Voters, experts lament heritage not a poll issue

- In the name of Vikas, Virasat is being razed in Patna. Politicians and candidates are talking about serious issues but heritage isn't one of them

For 20-year-old college student Aman Lal, a Lok Sabha election poster mounted in Patna bearing the slogan — 'Virasat Bhi, Vikas Bhi' — feels like a "cruel joke" for the Bihar capital which has lost several heritage buildings to demolition in the last few years.

Lal, a first-time voter, on the cusp of graduation from the historic Patna College, laments that despite a "colossal loss" of built heritage in his city, it is "not a poll issue" for politicians or people.

However, the ruling BJP, in its 2024 polls manifesto, has mentioned that it will "develop religious and tourist sites inspired by the Kashi Vishwanath corridor model" and preserve culturally important Archaeological Survey of India monuments, while the Congress has promised to provide "more funds" and human resources to the ASI if it comes to power.

Notwithstanding such poll promises, many voters from Delhi to Patna and Bengaluru to Mumbai, are upset about "built heritage" not being talked about as a poll issue.

"In the name of 'Vikas', our 'Virasat' is being razed in Patna. And, politicians and candidates in Bihar are talking about various issues, but heritage isn't one. It is election time and the over 90-year-old Women's Hospital of the historic PMCH (Patna Medical College and Hospital) stands badly bruised today, but does any party care? Has any politician or candidate raised the issue of constant erasure of signposts of our past," Lal asked.

The entire frontal structure of the iconic Women's Hospital, which bore one of the finest European architectural designs was pulled down in March around the time the 2024 general elections schedule was announced in New Delhi.

In the last several years, several historic buildings have been razed in Patna, the prime one being the Patna Collectorate, bulldozed in 2022 to make way for a new collectorate complex, sparking outcry from various historians, scholars and architects.

"So, the slogan of 'Virasat Bhi, Vikas Bhi' feels like a cruel joke for Patna. It is only 'Vikas' being talked about here," Lal rued, adding that polls are starting on April 19, a day after the World Heritage Day, yet the issue finds no space in public or political debates.

Patna has lost many heritage buildings to demolition in the last few years ***PHOTO: X/ @ANUJDHAR***

Bengaluru-based conservation architect Yashaswini Sharma said built heritage is "not part of poll talks and election rallies" although "my city has lost many landmarks over the years".

She cites the case of the long-threatened 'Asiatic Building' popularly known as Janatha Bazaar in the heart of Bengaluru, and the historic Devaraja Market, constructed in the 1880s by the Mysore royals, and the Lansdowne Building, built in 1890s, in Mysuru. A legal battle to save these iconic structures is underway.

"Election rallies see huge gatherings of masses, and politicians and leaders can use this opportunity to help build more awareness about our cultural and natural heritage and generate a greater sense of pride for our built heritage, but they really, so far, have missed this opportunity," Sharma told PTI.

The author of "Bangalore: the Early City" said many people wrongly think that heritage is "contrary to development" and that its conservation is an "elitist subject".

Heritage and modernity can "coexist" and old buildings are "smart and resilient" which can be "reused and redeveloped to generate revenues," she said.

"We need a change in attitude. We speak of the importance of religious heritage, so we also need to bring civic heritage that is not linked to any religion, into the mainstream. And, media will also have to play an important role in achieving that goal," the conservation architect said, adding that historic buildings should not be reduced merely to a "nice backdrop" in poll-related TV shows.

Demolition of historic buildings leads to "loss of urban memory and cultural identity", and like food, water and jobs, people and politicians should "also be concerned about the fate of built heritage," she said.

Convener of INTACH Bangalore Chapter and author of "Discovering Bengaluru: History. Neighbourhoods. Walks", Meera Iyer, feels heritage doesn't become an election issue, because, most people in the country "do not care about heritage, really, especially, built heritage".

But, they "care about their religious heritage" so that figures in the discourse and media debates, she said.

Former Union minister Vijay Goel, who has been very vocal on the issue of "decaying heritage" in old Delhi and the need for its conservation and preservation, said, "Heritage should become a poll issue".

He alleged that heritage today has become "a thing of status or fashion" or "reduced to just articles and stories".

Goel has worked on the upkeep of heritage buildings and his Dharampura Haveli restoration project has now become one of the yardsticks for conservation in the city.

"In old Delhi, many centuries-old havelis are either crumbling or being razed by owners, and I have also written to the Delhi Lt Governor recently highlighting the matter. Heritage has to be an important issue and people should be concerned about it," he said.

—PTI

PHOTO: AL JAZEERA

1 killed, 20 injured at Iran-allied group's base in Iraq

TEHRAN, 20 APRIL

At least one person has been killed and 20 injured after a blast at a military base in Iraq used by the Iran-aligned Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF), according to security sources. The PMF said "the attack" late on Friday targeted the Kalsu military base, located some 50km (31 miles) south of the capital Baghdad in the province of Babil (Babylon). Videos and images from the scene showed a huge explosion, which also set fire to trees in the surrounding areas, spreading the blaze. Footage from inside the base on Saturday morning showed a large crater and damage to infrastructure and vehicles. In a statement, the PMF claimed "American aggression bombed the Kalso military base", which is located near the town of Iskandariya. *—Al Jazeera*

N Korea conducts test on new 'large warhead'

SEOUL, 20 APRIL

North Korea has conducted a test on a "super-large warhead" designed for a strategic cruise missile, state media reports, adding that it also launched a new type of anti-aircraft missile. "The DPRK Missile Administration has conducted a power test of a super-large warhead designed for 'Hwasal-1 Ra-3' strategic cruise missile", KCNA news agency reported on Saturday, referring to North Korea by an abbreviation for its official name – Democratic People's Republic of Korea. North Korea also carried out a test launch on Friday afternoon of a "Pyoljji-1-2", which state media said was a "new-type anti-aircraft missile". KCNA added that "a certain goal was attained" through the test without providing further details. *— Al Jazeera*

Apple removes WhatsApp from app store in China

WASHINGTON, 20 APRIL

Apple has removed WhatsApp and Threads from its app store in China after the country's internet watchdog issued orders, citing national security concerns, CNN reported. An Apple spokesperson said that the Cyberspace Administration of China ordered the removal of these apps from China. "We are obligated to follow the laws in the countries where we operate, even when we disagree," an Apple spokesperson said while speaking to CNN. "The Cyberspace Administration of China ordered the removal of these apps from the China storefront based on their national security concerns. These apps remain available for download on all other storefronts where they appear," the spokesperson added. *—ANI*

First statements in hush-money trial set for Monday

WASHINGTON, 20 APRIL

A jury is set to hear opening statements on Monday on whether former US President Donald Trump falsified bank records to hide an alleged affair from people in the 2016 election, The Washington Post reported. The trial began this week with a speedy but emotional jury selection. A few potential jurors cried as they considered whether they could handle the first-ever trial of a former president. Trump is accused of falsifying business records related to a hush-money deal with an adult film actress made ahead of the 2016 election, The Hill reported. He has pleaded not guilty. New York Supreme Court Justice Juan Merchan expressed gratitude to the participants for their bravery as several shared painful details regarding their pasts in front of reporters during the jury screening process, according to Washington Post.*—ANI*

Israel-Iran's war gives new insights into both militaries

Int'l community hoped that Friday's strikes may end the war

WASHINGTON, 20 APRIL

Israel demonstrated its military dominance over adversary Iran in its apparent precision strikes that hit near military and nuclear targets deep in the heart of the country, meeting little significant challenge from Iran's defences and providing the world with new insights into both militaries' capabilities.

The international community, Israel and Iran all signalled hopes that Friday's airstrikes would end what has been a dangerous 19-day run of strikes and counterstrikes, a highly public test between two deep rivals that had previously stopped short of most direct confrontation.

The move into open fighting began 1 April with the suspected Israeli killing of Iranian generals at an Iranian diplomatic compound in Syria. That prompted Iran's retaliatory barrage last weekend of more than 300 missiles and drones that the US, Israel and regional and international partners helped bat down without significant damage in Israel. And then came Friday's apparent Israeli strike.

Iran's military in parade action on Saturday PHOTO: X/@IRANDEFENSE

As all sides took stock, regional security experts predicted that Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right government and the country's allies would emerge encouraged by the Israeli military's superior performance. In response to international appeals, however, both Israel and Iran had appeared to be holding back their full military force throughout the more than two weeks of hostilities, aiming to send messages rather than escalate to a full-scale war.

Crucially, experts also cautioned that Iran had not brought into the main battle its greatest military advantage over Israel — Hezbollah and other Iran-allied armed groups in the region. Hezbollah in particular is capable of straining Israel's ability to defend itself, especially in any multifront conflict.

Overall, "the big-picture lesson to take away is that unless Iran does absolutely everything at its disposal all at once, it is just the David, and not the Goliath, in this equation," said Charles Lister, a senior fellow and longtime regional researcher at the Washington-based Middle East Institute.

In Friday's attack, Iranian state television said the country's air defence batteries fired in several provinces following reports of drones. Iranian army commander Gen. Abdolrahim Mousavi said crews targeted several flying objects.

Lister said it appeared to have been a single mission by a small number of Israeli aircraft. After crossing Syrian airspace, it appears they fired only two or three Blue Sparrow air-to-surface missiles into Iran, most likely from a standoff position in the airspace of Iran's neighbour Iraq, he said. *—AP*

Palestinians search for survivors after an Israel airstrikes on a residential building in Rafah refugee camp, southern Gaza Strip PHOTO: PTI

At least 10 killed in air attacks on Rafah

RAFAH, 20 APRIL

At least 10 people, many women and children, have been killed in Israeli air attacks on residential homes in Gaza's Rafah city.

Israeli forces have injured seven more Palestinians during their raid of Tulkarem's Nur Shams refugee camp, which has now taken place for about 40 hours, according to Palestinian media reports citing the Palestinian Red Crescent Society. Israeli forces have also raided the West Bank towns of Beit Furik, near Nablus, and Beit Rima, near Ramallah.

Meanwhile, Israel's Coordination of Government Activities in the Territories (COGAT) said on Friday that 276 aid trucks carrying humanitarian supplies underwent inspection and were permitted entry into Gaza on Friday, CNN reported.

COGAT, the Israeli military body responsible for administering Israeli policy in Gaza and the West Bank, disclosed this information. In an official post on X, COGAT disclosed the information while sharing the video of trucks entering Gaza carrying humanitarian supplies. "Nine trucks of medical aid were coordinated to the Emirati Hospital, and nine trucks of medical aid were coordinated to the ICRC Hospital," the COGAT statement reads. *—Al Jazeera/ANI*

United States close to passing long-awaited aid for Ukraine

WASHINGTON, 20 APRIL

After months of delay, the US House of Representatives is poised to hold a vote on tens of billions of dollars in American military aid for Ukraine and Israel this weekend.

Both measures have vocal opponents in Congress, however, and their hopes of passage have hinged on a fragile bipartisan coalition to overcome daunting procedural and legislative obstacles.

Speaker of the House Mike Johnson has said he is determined to bring the matter to a vote, even if it may put his hold on power in jeopardy. The Ukraine vote will be closely watched in Kyiv, which has warned of an urgent need for fresh support from its allies as Russia makes steady gains on the battlefield.

Ukraine militaries near borderline pose for a photo PHOTO: X/@DEFENCEU

What's in the aid bills?

Johnson's foreign aid proposal provides $60.8bn (£49bn) to Ukraine, $26.4bn to Israel and $8.1bn to the Indo-Pacific region, including Taiwan. The House of Representatives will vote on each component individually, raising the possibility that some components will be approved and others will fail.

The Speaker is also bringing a fourth piece of legislation to a vote, which includes requiring that Chinese company ByteDance divest itself of the TikTok social media app, authorising the sale of frozen Russian assets, and imposing new sanctions on Russia, Iran and China. Whatever passes will be combined into one bill that will then have to be approved as a whole by the Senate before it reaches the president's desk.

Why have they been held up?

Opinion polls suggest that a growing number of Republicans oppose any new aid to Ukraine.

Some liberals are against military support for Israel. While these sentiments were not enough to prevent the US Senate from passing legislation that contained support for both nations in February, it has been a different story in the House.

Johnson has a slim majority in the chamber, and a handful of conservatives have threatened to push for his removal if he backs new Ukraine aid. The effort, led by Georgia congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene, has two other supporters so far: Thomas Massie of Kentucky and Paul Gosar of Arizona. *—BBC News*

Ministry said out of 21 17 crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait or its extension PHOTO: X/@ALARABIYA_ENG

Taiwan detects 21 Chinese aircraft: Min

TAIPEI, 20 APRIL

- The aircraft dispatched by the Chinese military were spotted starting at 8:15 am and included Shenyang J-16 fighter jets, Shaanxi Y-8 transport aircraft, and various types of unmanned aerial vehicles, the MND said, as per Taiwan News

Taiwan has detected 21 Chinese military aircraft, including Shenyang J-16 fighter jets, Shaanxi Y-8 transport aircraft, and drones, of which 17 crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait or its extension on Saturday morning, Taiwan News reported.

In an official post on X, Taiwan's Ministry of National Defence said, "We detected activities from 21 PLA aircraft, including J-16, Y-8, and drones, since 0815 (UTC+8). 17 aircraft crossed the median line and its extension, entered our northern, central, and southwestern ADIZ, and joined PLA vessels for joint combat patrol."

The aircraft dispatched by the Chinese military were spotted starting at 8:15 am and included Shenyang J-16 fighter jets, Shaanxi Y-8 transport aircraft, and various types of unmanned aerial vehicles, the MND said, as per Taiwan News.

According to the ministry, the 17 planes either crossed the median line of the Taiwan Strait or entered Taiwan's air defence identification zone (ADIZ) off the northern, central and southwestern parts of the country, in tandem with patrolling activities carried out by Chinese military vessels in the areas.

In response to this breach done by China, MND affirmed that they are closely monitoring the situation and have "dispatched appropriate assets" to respond to the situation accordingly.

According to Taiwan News, the defence ministry had earlier tracked three Chinese military aircraft entering the median line or its extension in the 24-hour period starting at 6 am on Friday. *—ANI*

SL church reiterates Easter Sunday probe doubts

COLOMBO, 20 APRIL

The Catholic church here on Saturday reiterated its dissatisfaction over the nature of the investigations conducted by the Sri Lankan government in connection with the 2019 Easter Sunday bombings that killed 270 people, including Indians. Fr Cyril Gamini Fernando, the spokesman for the church, told reporters that he had presented a questionnaire to the police that had provided important information about the investigation. Fernando, said the 8-point questionnaire pins police to investigate the alleged links between certain sections of the military intelligence with the local jihadi group. *—PTI*

AMID ECONOMIC CRUNCH

US sanctions Chinese firms for providing missiles to Pak

US has also slapped one Belarus company PHOTO: X/@OSINTUPDATES

WASHINGTON, 20 APRIL

The US has slapped sanctions on three Chinese companies and one from Belarus for supplying missile-applicable items for Pakistan's ballistic missile programmes, including its long-range missile programme, the State Department has announced.

The names of the companies are Xi'an Longde Technology Development, Tianjin Creative Source International Trade and Granpect Co Ltd from China and Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant from Belarus. These entities "have engaged in activities or transactions that have materially contributed to, or pose a risk of materially contributing to, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction or their means of delivery, including any efforts to manufacture, acquire, possess, develop, transport, transfer or use such items, by Pakistan," State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller said on Friday.

Miller said the US is committed to strengthening the global nonproliferation regime by taking action to disrupt procurement networks supporting proliferation activities of concern. China, an all-weather ally of Pakistan, has been the main supplier of arms and defence equipment to Islamabad's ambitious military modernisation programme.

The Minsk Wheel Tractor Plant in Belarus supplied special vehicle chassis to Pakistan's long-range ballistic missile programme. Such chassis are used as launch support equipment for ballistic missiles by Pakistan's National Development Complex. *—PTI*

Pakistan makes formal request to IMF for another bailout

WASHINGTON/ISLAMABAD, 20 APRIL

Pakistan has made a formal request to IMF for seeking the next bailout package in the range of USD 6 to USD 8 billion with the possibility of augmentation through climate financing, a media report said on Saturday. Pakistan also requested to dispatch IMF review mission next month to firm up details of the next bailout package for three years under the Extended Fund Facility. *—PTI*

Pakistan PM set to visit Saudi

ISLAMABAD, 20 APRIL

Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is expected to visit Saudi Arabia soon, his second trip this month to the friendly Gulf kingdom, to advance investment talks as his cash-strapped government has presented lucrative returns on Saudi investment.

According to The Express Tribune, in addition to the enticing prospects of harvesting rich dividends on investment, Pakistan has assured priority in profits to Saudi investors without any hindrances. Sharif's government has presented returns ranging from an appealing 14 per cent to an astounding 50 per cent on Saudi investment, the report said.

According to government sources involved in these discussions, the indicated returns on Saudi investment are expected to allow the Kingdom to recoup its invested capital within three to nine years, depending on the nature of the project. Pakistan aims to advance the Saudi Arabia investment initiative during the April 27-28 visit of Sharif, who will be accompanied by a team from the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC).

Prime Minister Sharif was in Jeddah earlier this month to perform Umrah and met Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and discussed a planned USD 5 billion Saudi investment package for Pakistan, according to the joint statement issued by both countries. The visit to Saudi Arabia was the first foreign vis it by Sharif since he assumed office in March. *—PTI*

VENEZUELA PREZ POLL

Oppn in trumoil as Maduro picks rival

CARACAS, 20 APRIL

Venezuela's main Opposition coalition agreed Friday to unite behind former diplomat Edmundo González as its challenger to President Nicolás Maduro in this summer's election, acting one day before the deadline to formalise its candidate.

The decision was reached unanimously by the 10 parties in Unitary Democratic Platform, Omar Barboza, the coalition's executive secretary, said after a five-hour meeting that included discussions of other possible candidates.

The bloc had been allowed to provisionally register González on March 26 after the government came under a wave of criticism when opposition leaders said they were blocked from registering their candidate of choice. Saturday was the deadline to make his candidacy final.

The decision was reached by 10 parties in UDP PHOTO: X/@WICARY

The Opposition group needed to replace its first candidate, María Corina Machado, who easily won a primary organized by the bloc in October but was barred by the government from running after the ruling party-controlled State Comptroller's Office disqualified her from holding public office for 15 years.

Maduro's administration has cracked down on Opposition before the 28 July presidential election despite promises to pave the way to fair elections in exchange for sanctions relief. The Biden administration on Wednesday reimposed crushing oil sanctions, criticizing Maduro's moves. The governments of Colombia and Brazil also have expressed concern, and Guatemalan President Bernardo Arévalo accused Maduro's government of "consolidating an anti-democratic system." *—AP*

PHOTO: PTI

HDFC Bank Q4 net profit grows to Rs 17,622cr

MUMBAI, 20 APRIL

HDFC Bank on Saturday reported a 2.11 per cent growth in consolidated net profit to Rs 17,622.38 crore for the March 2024 quarter against Rs 17,257.87 crore in the preceding December quarter. On a standalone basis, the country's largest private sector lender reported a net profit of Rs 16,511.85 crore compared to Rs 16,372.54 crore in the December quarter. In July 2023, the bank merged its home loan-focused parent HDFC into itself. Its core net interest income grew to Rs 29,080 crore for the reporting quarter, while the other income grew to Rs 18,170 crore. The lender has reported its core net interest margin of 3.44 per cent on total assets. The gross non-performing assets ratio came at 1.24 per cent. *—PTI*

FarEye launches program to support startups

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

FarEye launched Innovation Nexus to help logistics startups raise funds and receive mentoring. The initiative offers a platform for startups to engage with industry leaders. Startups are essential in reducing logistics costs, and Innovation Nexus aims to be a game changer. Last-mile Technology platform FarEye on Saturday said it has launched an initiative, Innovation Nexus, to help startups raise funds and receive mentoring from global experts in the logistics sector. The initiative will provide a direct platform for promising logistics startups to engage with industry leaders and foster connections, Over 40 supply chain experts from more than 20 countries, representing diverse industries, including retail, logistics, postal, consumer packaged goods (CPG), and pharmaceuticals, came together to explore the transformative potential of technology *—PTI*

BNI Symposium to be Guj's biggest business conclave

AHMEDABAD, 20 APRIL

The countdown has begun for the much-anticipated BNI Symposium 2024, the flagship event of BNI Ahmedabad and the city's biggest business conclave, promising to be an unparalleled celebration of entrepreneurship, collaboration, and success.

Breaking new ground, Symposium 2024 will be open to BNI members nationwide, facilitating collaboration and networking on an even bigger scale. BNI executive directors from across India will participate in the festivities and witness the legacy of 10 years of BNI Ahmedabad. In sync with BNI's vision of expanding collaboration and connectivity, The symposium is a unique event centred on celebrating the BNI community and maximising the value of their connections. It is not only the city's biggest business extravaganza but also an excellent platform to connect and network with members across the country and spread wings. *—PTI*

Govt aims to make India attractive for manufacturing: Sitharaman

Centre has tailored policies with an aim to produce domestic markets & exports

AHMEDABAD, 20 APRIL

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman on Saturday said Centre has tailored policies to make India an attractive destination for manufacturing and services, and the aim was to produce not just for the domestic market but for exports as well.

She was responding to a query on American tech billionaire Elon Musk postponing his meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Tesla CEO Musk on Saturday said his visit to India has been delayed due to the company's heavy obligations.

Asserting the Union government's approach has helped especially after China plus one started being a concern for many industry experts, she said policies have been tailored in such a way so as to make India an attractive destination for manufacturing and for services.

Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman during an interaction with Gujarat Chamber of Commerce & Industry (GCCI) members, in Ahmedabad, on Saturday *PHOTO:PTI*

Speaking about inflation, she said it never crossed the tolerance band, except for one month, under the Narendra Modi government, whereas before that (pre-2014) the economy was in a bad shape and inflation was in double digits.

On employment, Sitharaman said there was lack of complete data from both the formal and informal sectors, but asserted initiatives of the Centre have ensured jobs to lakhs.

When asked about the rule that requires larger companies to pay Micro, Small and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs) within 45 days of receiving goods or services, Sitharaman said the law has been existence since 2007-08 and is not new.

Queried about the Indian rupee weakening against the US dollar, she said the fluctuation was due to global uncertainty, wars as well as uncertainty in supply of crude oil from the Middle East.

Earlier, addressing industry leaders from Gujarat on 'Viksit Bharat -2047', she said 28 per cent of total capital under Production Linked Incentive (PLI) scheme has come to the state, which has shown remarkable alertness in the last 10-12 years.

So semiconductor manufacturing for India comes first in Gujarat, which has a policy as well as government and ecosystem ready for manufacturing for Viksit Bharat 2047, she said.

She also said Gujarat was in third position in attracting FDI in manufacturing. *—PTI*

'INDIA'S ECO RESTORATION A CASE STUDY FOR HARVARD'

AHMEDABAD, 20 APRIL

The restoration of the Indian economy, especially banks since 2014 is actually a lesson for the Harvard Business School said finance minister Nirmala Sitharaman, while addressing the gathering at the Gujarat Chambers of Commerce and Industry (GCCI), in Ahmedabad on Saturday. The finance minister was speaking on the topic Vikshit Bharat 2047.

She underscored the transition of India's banking sector and the reforms initiated by the government since 2014.

Sitharaman pointed out the twin balance sheet problem prevailing in 2014, where banks' balance sheets were burdened with non-performing assets (NPAs), hindering lending to companies, while companies themselves struggled to repay loans.

Sitharaman highlighted the failure of the Silicon Valley bank in the United States and emphasized the Indian government's role in safeguarding the infrastructure of Indian banks. She praised the Indian banking sector for effectively managing mergers. *—ANI*

World Bank receives $11 billion US fund for new financial year

WASHINGTON, 20 APRIL

The World Bank has received endorsements of USD 11 billion for the new financial instruments aimed at boosting lending capacity and addressing shared global challenges.

According to a release by the World Bank, eleven countries announced commitments totalling USD 11 billion for the Portfolio Guarantee Platform, hybrid capital mechanism, and new Liveable Planet Fund.

The World Bank Group's leveraging capability allows pledged resources to be multiplied six to eight times over 10 years, potentially reaching up to tenfold under certain conditions. These pledged resources could provide up to $70 billion in urgently needed funds to tackle cross-border challenges and advance development goals.

The eleven countries including, Belgium, France, Japan, and the United States have pledged to the Portfolio Guarantee Platform, while Denmark, Germany, Italy, Latvia, the Netherlands, Norway, and the United Kingdom committed to hybrid capital.

The World Bank Group has implemented a series of reforms and developed innovative financial instruments as part of the Capital Adequacy Framework review, recommended by the G20 Expert Group. These reforms include adjusting the loan-to-equity ratio, increasing bilateral guarantee limits, maximizing callable capital benefits, introducing hybrid capital, and developing the Portfolio Guarantee Platform and Liveable Planet Fund.

World Bank Group has taken steps to develop IBRD 50-year loans at no additional cost for borrowers and reduce interest rates for projects addressing global challenges, partially funded through the Liveable Planet Fund. *—ANI*

PHOTO: WORLDBANK.ORG

- World Bank Group has implemented a series of reforms and developed innovative financial instruments as part of the Capital Adequacy Framework review

Zomato gets ₹11.82cr tax notice

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Online food delivery platform Zomato has received a tax demand and penalty order of Rs 11.82 crore related to GST on export services provided to its subsidiaries located outside India from July 2017 to March 2021. The order was passed by the Additional Commissioner, Central Goods and Services Tax, Gurugram, raising the GST demand of Rs 5,90,94,889, with applicable interest (not quantified) and penalty of Rs 5,90,94,889.

"We believe that we have a strong case on merits, and the company will be filing an appeal against the order before the appropriate authority," Zomato stated in a regulatory filing late evening on Friday. It informed that the demand order has been received, "confirming demand of GST on export services provided by the company to its subsidiaries located outside India during the period July 2017 to March 2021 by upholding that such services do not fulfil the conditions for the supply to qualify as export of service under GST". "The company, in its response to the show cause notice, had clarified on the allegations, along with supporting documents and judicial precedents, which appears not to have been appreciated by the authorities while passing the order," it added. *—PTI*

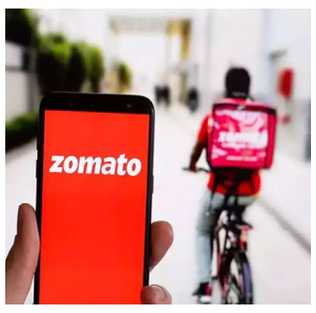


PHOTO: PTI

Wipro Q4 net profit falls 7.8% CEO flags uncertainty in economy

BENGALURU, 20 APRIL

IT service company Wipro on Friday reported a 7.8 per cent year-on-year decline in its consolidated net profit for the March quarter to about Rs 2834.6 crore, and cautioned that the macroeconomic environment remains "uncertain".

The Bengaluru-headquartered company, which recently saw a change of guard with Srinivas Pallia taking over at the helm as the new Chief Executive Officer, has given IT Services revenue growth guidance in the (-)1.5 per cent to +0.5 per cent band for June quarter on a constant currency basis.

While the numbers were in line with the analysts' estimates, the guidance of the company was below industry expectations.

Newly appointed Wipro CEO Srinivas Pallia (L) at the announcement of the company's Q4 results, in Bengaluru *PHOTO: PTI*

Wipro also recorded one of the highest declines of 24,516 in the headcount on a year-on-year basis to 2,34,054 during the just-ended fiscal year which it attributed to weak demand environment and push for operational efficiency in the company.

For the Q4FY24, Wipro's revenue from operations slipped 4.2 per cent year-on-year to Rs 22,208.3 crore.

Wipro's total order bookings was at USD 3.6 billion during the reported quarter.

Wipro's headcount fell to 2,34,054 as on March 2024, 9.1 per cent lower than the year-ago period. *—PTI*

X'S ALTERNATIVE POST NEWS TO SHUT DOWN

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Post News, a microblogging site that emerged in the days after Elon Musk's Twitter acquisition, is shutting down just a year and a half after launching in beta.

Founder Noam Bardin, previously CEO of Waze, broke the news in a post on Friday.

Post's strategy was to harness Twitter's reputation as a virtual watercooler for journalists, then build on that further by creating a new way for publishers and writers to monetize. Instead of subscribing to various different publications, Post users could purchase individual articles from certain partner outlets.

Despite Post's closure, Bardin said he thinks that the company proved something about the different ways in which digital news outlets can monetize. He wrote that Post "validated many theories around micropayments and consumers' willingness to purchase individual articles." The platform also allowed users to tip writers for their work.

Bardin is right that the media landscape is changing. There are more independent and worker-owned publications than ever, hosted on tech platforms like Substack, Beehiiv and Ghost. But perhaps it was too soon to try to capture this nascent movement in a social platform. Around the same time that Post sprung up, a number of other Twitter alternatives threw their hat into the ring to capture the population of users who would be dissatisfied with Musk's ownership decisions. *—PTI*

Premier Energies files IPO papers with Sebi; looks to raise ₹1,500cr

In FY23, its revenue from operations stood at Rs 1,428 cr *PHOTO: PREMIER ENERGIES*

NEW DELHI, 20 APRIL

Solar cell company Premier Energies Ltd has filed preliminary papers with capital markets regulator Sebi to raise funds through an initial public offering (IPO).

The Hyderabad-based company's IPO is a combination of a fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 1,500 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of up to 2.82 crore shares by a promoter and investors, according to the draft red herring prospectus (DRHP) made public on Saturday.

Under the OFS component, South Asia Growth Fund II Holdings LLC will divest 2.38 crore equity shares, South Asia EBT Trust will divest 1.53 lakh equity shares, and promoter Chiranjeev Singh Saluja will sell 42 lakh equity shares.

The company may consider a pre-IPO placement aggregating up to Rs 300 crore. If such placement is undertaken, the fresh issue size will be reduced. Premier Energies is an integrated solar cell and module manufacturer with a 2GW capacity for cells and 3.36GW for modules.

Additionally, the company offers EPC solutions, O&M (operations & maintenance) services, and operates as an independent power producer (IPO). It has five manufacturing facilities, including in Hyderabad and Telangana.

As of FY23, its revenue from operations stood at Rs 1,428 crore, and Rs 2,017 crore for the nine months ended 31 December, 2023. *—PTI*

- IPO is a combination of a fresh issue of equity shares worth Rs 1,500 crore and an offer for sale (OFS) of up to 2.82 crore shares by a promoter and investors

ANTICIPATED EVENT

Here's what you need to know about Bitcoin's latest 'halving'

NEW YORK, 20 APRIL

The "miners" who chisel bitcoins out of complex mathematics are taking a 50% pay cut — effectively reducing new production of the world's largest cryptocurrency, again.

Bitcoin's latest "halving" appeared to occur Friday night. Soon after the highly anticipated event, the price of bitcoin held steady at about $63,907.

Now, all eyes are on what will happen down the road. Beyond bitcoin's long-term price behavior, which relies heavily on other market conditions, experts point to potential impacts on the day-to-day operations of the asset's miners themselves. But, as with everything in the volatile cryptoverse, the future is hard to predict.

What is bitcoin halving and why does it matter?

Bitcoin "halving," a preprogrammed event that occurs roughly every four years, impacts the production of bitcoin. Miners use farms of noisy, specialized computers to solve convoluted math puzzles; and when they complete one, they get a fixed number of bitcoins as a reward.

Halving does exactly what it sounds like — it cuts that fixed income in half. And when the mining reward falls, so does the number of new bitcoins entering the market. That means the supply of coins available to satisfy demand grows more slowly.

How often does halving occur?

Per bitcoin's code, halving occurs after the creation of every 210,000 "blocks" — where transactions are recorded — during the mining process.

No calendar dates are set in stone, but that divvies out to roughly once every four years.

Only time will tell. Following each of the three previous halvings, the price of bitcoin was mixed in the first few months and wound up significantly higher one year later. But as investors well know, past performance is not an indicator of future results.

At the time of the last halving in May 2020, for example, bitcoin's price stood at around $8,602, according to CoinMarketCap — and climbed almost seven-fold to nearly $56,705 by May 2021. Bitcoin prices nearly quadrupled a year after July 2016's halving and shot up by almost 80 times one year out from bitcoin's first halving in November 2012. Experts stress that other bullish market conditions contributed to returns.

Price of Bitcoin held steadly at $63,907 *PHOTO: FREEPIK*

What about environment?

Pinpointing definitive data on the environmental impacts directly tied to bitcoin halving is still a bit of a question mark.

But it's no secret that crypto mining consumes a lot of energy overall — and operations relying on pollutive sources have drawn particular concern over the years.

Recent research published found that the carbon footprint of 2020-2021 bitcoin mining across 76 nations was equivalent to emissions of burning 84 billion pounds of coal or running 190 natural gas-fired power plants. Coal satisfied the bulk of bitcoin's electricity demands (45%), followed by natural gas (21%) and hydropower (16%).

—PTI

Little room for error as RCB face KKR

Virat Kohli is once again leading the runs chart with 361

KOLKATA, 20 APRIL

Aware that they cannot afford any more slip-ups, Royal Challengers Bengaluru (RCB) will have their task cut out when they face dominant hosts Kolkata Knight Riders in a tricky Indian Premier League match here on Sunday.

RCB's pursuit of a maiden IPL title has once again hit a roadblock following six losses in seven matches. With five consecutive defeats, the bottom-ranked RCB now confront the daunting task of winning their remaining seven games to keep their playoff prospects alive.

For a side that has been severely let down by their bowlers and relies heavily on the batting prowess of Virat Kohli, Faf du Plessis and veteran Dinesh Karthik, facing KKR presents a significant challenge. "From a bowling perspective, we don't have as many weapons. So, unfortunately, it comes down to the batters to make sure that we use our form and our confidence. The scores that we put on the board are probably going to be the only way we are going to get into the competition," their skipper Du Plessis has admitted earlier.

The fact that they are coming after conceding the IPL's record total of 287/3 by Sunrisers Hyderabad in their last match will undoubtedly linger in the minds of their bowlers. It would not be a bad idea to bring back their most expensive (Rs 11.5-crore) buy this season, Alzarri Joseph, to go alongside Mohammed Siraj, who was not picked against SRH.

Joseph has bagged a solitary wicket in three appearances for RCB while also getting hammered at 11.89 runs per over. Glenn Maxwell's spin also could have been a nice option, but the struggling Australian all-rounder, who pulled out of the game against SRH citing "mental fatigue", is also battling a hip strain that may keep him out of action for some more time.

Kohli is once again leading the run chart with 361 runs at 72.20, though his middle over strike rate of 135 has been a cause of concern. KKR, who have played one match less then RCB, will also eye a return to winning ways and inch closer to playoffs by taking their tally to 10 points at the midway stage. The biggest threat for RCB will be Narine, not just with the ball but also with the bat at the top of the order. —*PTI*

RCB's top order batsman Virat Kohli talking to KKR's head coach Gautam Gambhir during the practice session ahead of the match on Saturday ***PHOTO: X/@RCBTWEETS***

PBKS, GT look to resurrect campaigns

Former champions GT have slipped to 8th position in the table

MULLANPUR, 20 APRIL

Their campaigns wobbling after a string of defeats, bottom-rung teams Punjab Kings and Gujarat Titans will be desperate to arrest the slide and get back to winning ways in their Indian Premier League match here on Sunday.

Former champions GT have slipped to eighth position in the pecking order after an embarrassing loss to Delhi Capitals at home, where they were bowled out for 89 to suffer their third defeat in four matches.

PBKS are struggling in the ninth place following a nine-run loss to Mumbai Indians away on Thursday night, the margin of defeat made respectable by an incredible rear-guard act by the in-form young duo of Ashutosh Sharma and Shashank Singh after the team was tottering at 14/4 in a chase of 193.

Five losses and two wins in seven outings hardly inspire confidence and irrespective of the fact that their upcoming opponents are also struggling to get their act right, PBKS will have their task cut out in front of their fans, who had little to cheer about so far this season at the newly-inaugurated home venue.

The absence of their influential skipper Shikhar Dhawan in the last few matches has hit PBKS hard and doubts remain over the southpaw's availability for Sunday's fixture.

Dhawan has been undergoing rehabilitation since picking up a shoulder injury during the home fixture against Sunrisers Hyderabad on 9 April, resulting in England all-rounder Sam Curran to fill in as the skipper.

While Dhawan hasn't had a great time with the bat in IPL 2024, scoring 152 runs from five innings at a strike rate of 125.61, his presence at the top of the order as well as in the field matters for a side that seems to have forgotten how to win matches.

Having finished eighth in the last edition following eight losses and six victories, the story hasn't changed for PBKS, whose biggest concern has been the failure of their specialist batters.

The likes of Prabhsimran Singh, Liam Livingstone and Rilee Rossouw have failed to live up to the expectations, something that has affected the team badly. —*PTI*

Players from PBKS (L) and GT (R) ***PHOTO: PTI***

TODAY'S MATCH

PUNJAB KINGS 2024 vs GUJARAT TITANS

Time: 7:30 PM

Where To Watch:

Jio Cinema, Star Sports Network

Stadium: Yadavindra Singh Stadium, Punjab

ManU appoint Jason Wilcox as new technical director

MANCHESTER, 20 APRIL

Manchester United appointed former Southampton chief Jason Wilcox as technical director of the club with immediate effect. Wilcox will work with all technical areas of the football department to achieve the highest standards of performance. The club released an official statement to announce the appointment of their new technical director.—*ANI*

Record-chasing Korda one shot off Chevron lead

SEOUL, 20 APRIL

Thailand's Atthaya Thitikul and South Korea's Im Jin Hee hold a one-shot lead at the halfway stage of the Chevron Championship, the first women's major of the season. The pair lead American world number one Nelly Korda, who is bidding to win her fifth tournament in a row and second major title. Korda had the clubhouse lead in Texas on seven under after a round of 69. But late on, Thitikul and Im both shot 67s for eight-under totals. Jodi Ewart Shadoff and Lottie Woad lead the English challenge on four under.—*BBC*

Raducanu falls to Swiatek in Stuttgart QF

STUTTGART, 20 APRIL

Emma Raducanu has been knocked out of the Stuttgart Open despite a spirited quarter-final display against world number one Iga Swiatek.Britain's Raducanu, who is continuing her comeback from an injury-hit 2023 season, lost 7-6 (7-2) 6-3 against the clay-court specialist from Poland. Swiatek is on a 10-match winning run in Stuttgart, having won the last two editions of the WTA 500 tournament. She will face Kazakhstan's fourth seed Elena Rybakina next. Raducanu, 21, has enjoyed a return to form over the past week, helping Britain beat France in the Billie Jean King Cup. —*BBC*

Encourage girls to sports, says the little master

RANCHI, 20 APRIL

Cricket icon Sachin Tendulkar on Saturday urged parents to encourage and support their girls in sports and said that they will bring smiles on their faces. Tendulkar and his wife Anjali were in Ranchi to encourage girl football players of Yuwa Foundation at Ormanjhi block of the district. Yuwa and the Sachin Tendulkar Foundation work together here to train and promote girl footballers.

Tendulkar and his wife interacted with girl football players of Yuwa Foundation at their school located near Rukka Dam of the state capital and termed the day as remarkable. "Children's energy is infectious. I saw them working hard and enjoying themselves. I recalled my childhood," Tendulkar said while speaking to media persons.

"I got inspiration from many children because this journey is not easy for them. There are several difficulties in their lives even from home.

Sachin Tendulkar ***PHOTO: PTI***

They go to play football, which sometimes is not liked by parents. I would like to tell them to encourage children and support them. These children will bring smiles on their faces," Tendulkar said. Speaking about the Sachin Tendulkar Foundation, he said that it works in three verticals—education, sports and health. "Education is because my father was a professor, health because my wife is a doctor and sport because I am into it. If three are put together, it can shape the future of the country," he said. "Its team is honing the skills of girls, changing their lives, giving direction to their lives," he said. —*PTI*

I'M 100% READY TO PLAY T20I WORLD CUP, SAYS KARTHIK

KOLKATA, 20 APRIL

Veteran wicketkeeper-batter Dinesh Karthik, who has been in phenomenal form in this IPL, has not given up on his dream to play for India again and would do "everything he can to be in that flight" to the T20 World Cup in the USA and West Indies next month.

Karthik, who will turn 39 by the time the World Cup kickstarts on 1 June, was also part of the last edition of the T20I World Cup in Australia in 2022, which was also his last appearance for Team India. Since then he has become an off-the-field cricket expert, involved in commentary stints.

Returning to IPL this season, he has taken his batting to a new level and displayed some astonishing power-hitting to strike at a rate of 205-plus. He is also the third leading run-getter for RCB with 226 runs. "At this stage in my life, it would be the greatest feeling for me to represent India," he said. —*PTI*

PARIS OLYMPICS QUOTA

Vinesh secures 50kg for India

BISHKEK, 20 APRIL

Looking as dominant as ever, Vinesh Phogat locked Paris Olympics quota in women's 50kg category, reaching the final at the Asian Olympic Qualifier without conceding a single point, here Saturday.

It is India's second quota place for the Paris Games as Antim Panghal had earned a quota in the 53kg category with her bronze medal winning show at the World Championships last year. The 29-year-old Vinesh has now secured her third straight Olympic quota, having featured in Rio Games (2016) and in Tokyo (2020) earlier.

Vinesh, who was a prominent face of protest against former WFI chief Brij Bhushan Sharan Singh, dished out a strong performance, demolishing her opponents one by one. As is her wont, Vinesh looked for that one opportunity to subdue Miran Cheon in her opening bout and grabbed it after measuring her Korean rival for about 30 seconds.

Referee raises the hand of Indian wrestler Vinesh Phogat after she defeated Thi Ly Kieu of Vietnam in Asian Wrestling Championships ***PHOTO: PTI***

Once she grabbed Cheon and pushed her down for a take down, the bout ended in a jiffy, in one minute and 39 seconds. It was difficult to wriggle out of Vinesh's strong hold. The Indian employed gut wrench move thrice and mixed that with one 'expose' to finish the bout. The next bout lasted a mere 67 seconds. Cambodia's Smanang Dit was an easy prey. Vinesh pinned her in no time to move to the women's 50kg semifinal. The celebrated Indian faced some resistance from 19-year-old Kazakh wrestler Laura Ganikyzy in the semifinals but she used all her experience to foil the attacks employed by her younger rival. Twice Laura went for left-leg attacks but Vinesh scored on counter and led 4-0 by the end of the first period. This was the first time Vinesh was pushed to the second period in this tournament. The finalists at this competition are being awarded quota places for the 2024 Summer Olympics. —*PTI*

Onakoya: Nigerian breaks chess marathon record

NEW YORK, 20 APRIL

Under the beaming lights of New York's iconic Times Square, Nigerian chess master Tunde Onakoya has broken the record for the longest chess marathon.

After playing for 58 consecutive hours he was still at the board. Onakoya hopes to raise $1m (£805,000) for charity to support chess education for millions of children. Hundreds of supporters from the city's Nigerian community have shown up to cheer on the chess master, including Nigerian Afrobeats star Davido.

They provided music and energised him with supplies of classic Nigerian dishes, including the beloved national staple, jollof rice. Back home in Nigeria, people threw their support behind Onakoya as they watched him conquer the record on Twitch, a video-streaming service.

Supporters left messages on the stream commending Onakoya as an inspiration. "Thank you for daring to dream and showing us the levels to which we can all take our brain

Tunde Onakoya ***PHOTO: AP***

power to! Well done Tunde! I'm going to pick up my chess board back haha," one commenter wrote.

"Onakoya is a symbol of excellence and resilience that distinguish Nigerians both at home and abroad... Go, make history, and inscribe our name in gold," Nigeria's Vice-President Kashim Shettima posted on X.

The previous world record, recognised by Guinness World records, was 56 hours, nine minutes, and 37 seconds, which was set by Norwegian duo Hallvard Haug Flatebø and Sjur Ferkingstad in 2018. Onakoya, 29, credits chess with saving him from the overwhelming poverty he faced growing up in Lagos's infamous floating slums. —*BBC News*

F1 DOMINANCE

Verstappen takes pole for Chinese GP

SHANGHAI, 20 APRIL

Max Verstappen of Red Bull has completed a Formula 1 double, taking the pole Saturday for the Chinese Grand Prix just hours after winning the first F1 sprint of the season.

Teammate Sergio Perez will start alongside Verstappen on Sunday on the front row with Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin and Lando Norris of McLaren on the second row. Verstappen turned 1 minute 33.660 seconds on his fastest lap, 0.322 ahead of Perez.

Superlatives fail. The three-time defending F1 champion is unassailable — the sport's best driver in the quickest car. The Dutchman has won 22 of the last 26 GPs and three of the first four this season. Only a brake failure in Melbourne, Australia, probably kept him from sweeping all four races.

Look for more of the same on Sunday. "If the car is even only half as good as what it was in the sprint then I think we'll be all right," Verstappen said. This season he's won every pole, and his start from that spot on Sunday will be the 37th of his career — it's the 100th pole for Red Bull as a team — as he chases his 58th victory. "Of course, that's an incredible achievement for the whole team," Verstappen said.

"From my side, it's been a really good start to the year," he added in understatement. "I feel very confident in qualifying compared to last year. Just a shame of course that we retired in Melbourne, otherwise I think we could have had already a very strong lead." Alonso, who won season titles in 2005 and 2006, is still going strong. He turns 43 this summer, just signed a contract extension with Aston Martin and remains one of F1's quickest drivers.

"These kind of laps and moments are very encouraging for the future," the Spaniard said. He said on race day he's likely to finish "seven, eight or nine" — but no matter. "We are qualifying extremely well this year and we'll take it." Qualifying was run under dry conditions with similar weather expected for Sunday. —*AP*

Max Verstappen of Red Bull posses for a photograph after beating Lewis Hamilton in Chinese Grand Prix ***PHOTO: X/@MAX33VERSTAPPEN***